CALEB CONOVER
RAILROADER

ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

Caleb Conover, Railroader

By

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"Syria from the Saddle,"
"Dr. Dale" (in collaboration with Marion Harland),
"Columbia Stories," Etc.

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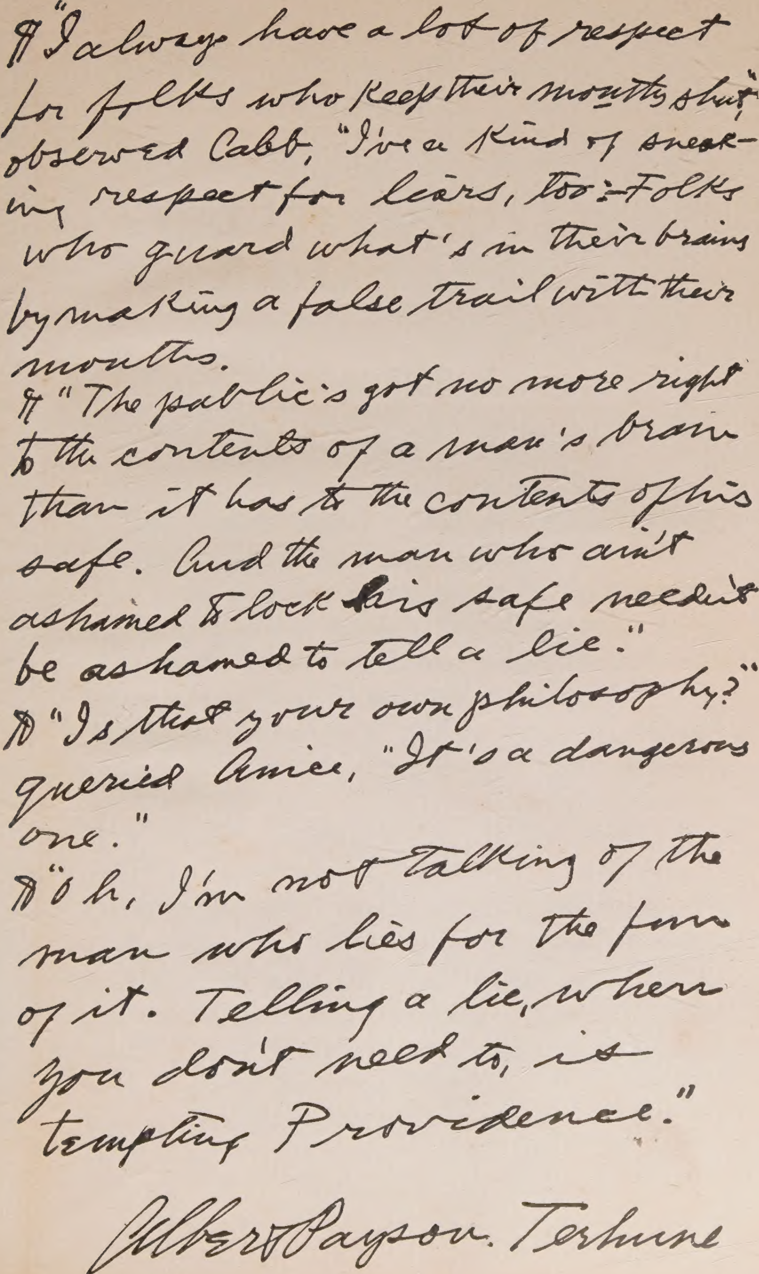
(FACSIMILE PAGE OF MANUSCRIPT FROM CALEB CONOVER, RAILROADER)



¶ "I always have a lot of respect for folks who keep their mouths shut," observed Cabb. "I've a kind of sneaking respect for liars, too:—Folks who guard what's in their brains by making a false trail with their mouths.

¶ "The public's got no more right to the contents of a man's brain than it has to the contents of his safe. And the man who ain't ashamed to lock his safe needn't be ashamed to tell a lie."

¶ "Is that your own philosophy?" queried Anice. "It's a dangerous one."

¶ "Oh, I'm not talking of the man who lies for the fun of it. Telling a lie, when you don't need to, is tempting Providence."

Albert Payson Terhune

CALEB CONOVER, RAILROADER

CHAPTER I

CALEB CONOVER RECEIVES

"THE poor man!" sighed Mrs. Greer. "He must think he's a cemetery!"

The long line of carriages was passing solemnly through a mighty white marble arch, aglare with electric light, leading into the "show place" of Pompton Avenue.

Athwart the arch's pallid face, in raised letters a full foot in length were the words:

"CALEB CONOVER, R.R., 1893."

In the ghastly, garish illumination, above the slow-moving procession of sombre vehicles, the arch and its inscription gave gruesome excuse for Mrs. Greer's comment. She herself thought the phrase rather apt, and stored it away for repetition.

Her husband, a downy little man, curled up miserably in the other corner of the brougham, read her thought, from long experience, and twisted forward into what he liked to think was a commanding attitude.

" Look here! " he protested. " You've got to stop that. It's bad enough to have to come here at all, without your spoiling everything with one of those Bernard Shawisms of yours. Why, if it ever got back to Conover's ears——"

" He'd withdraw his support? And then good-by to Congress for the unfortunate Talbot Firth Greer? "

" Just that. He'll stand all sorts of criticism about his start in life. In fact, he revels in talking of his rise to anyone who'll listen. But when it comes to guying anything in his present exalted——"

" What does the ' R. R.' at the end of his name over the gate stand for? I've seen the inscription often enough, but——"

" ' Railroader.' He uses it as a sort of title. Life for him is one long railroad, and——"

" And now we're to do him honor at the terminus? "

" If you like to put it that way. Perhaps ' junction ' would hit it closer. It was awfully good of you, Grace, to come. I——"

" Of course it was. If I didn't want a try at Washington I'd never have dared it. It will be in all the papers to-morrow. He'll see to that. And then—I hate to think what everyone will say. I suppose we're the first civilized people who ever passed under that atrocious hanging mortuary chapel, aren't we?"

"Hardly as bad as that. If it's any comfort to you, there are plenty more in the same box as ourselves, to-night."

"But surely everybody in Granite can't want to run for Congress?"

"No. But enough people have axes of their own to grind to make it worth their while to visit the Conover whetstone. When a man who can float companies at a word, boom or smash a dozen different stocks, swing the Legislature, make himself heard from here to Washington, and carries practically every newspaper in the Mountain State in his vest pocket; when——"

"When such a man whistles, there are some people who find it wise not to be deaf. But what on earth does he *want* us for?"

"The world-old ambition that had its rise when Cain and Abel began moving in separate sets. The longing to 'butt in,' as Caleb himself would probably call it. He has everything money and political power can give. And now he wants the only thing left—what he terms 'social recognition.'"

"And we are to help——"

"No. We're to let him *think* we help. All the king's horses and all the king's men, assisted by a score of Conover's own freight derricks, couldn't hoist that cad into a decent crowd. He's been at it ever since he got his first million and married poor little Letty Standish. She was the fool of her family, and a broken family at that. But still it was a family. Yet it didn't land Caleb anywhere. Then, when that unlicked cub of a son of his grew up, he made another try. But you know how that turned out. Now that his daughter's captured a more or less authentic prince, I suppose he thinks the time has come. Hence to-night's——"

"What a blow to his hopes it must have been to have the girl marry in Paris instead of here at Granite! But I suppose the honeymoon in America and this evening's reception are the next best thing. Are we never to get there?"

"Soon enough, I'm afraid. Conover boasts that he's laid out his grounds so that the driveway is a measured half-mile. We'll be there in another minute or so."

Mrs. Greer laughed a little nervously.

"It'll be something to remember anyway," said she. "I suppose all sorts of horrible people will be there. I read a half-page account of it this morning in the *Star*, and it said that 'while the proudest families of Granite would delight to do Mr. Conover honor, the humbler associates of political and business life would also be present.' Did you ever hear anything more delicious? And in the *Star*, too!"

"His own paper. Why not? I suppose *we're* the 'proudest families'; and the 'humbler associates' are some of the choice retinue of heelers who do his dirty work. Lord! what a notice of it there'll be in to-morrow's papers! Washington will have to be very much worth while to make up for this. If only I——"

"Hush!" warned Mrs. Greer, as the carriage lurched to a halt, in the pack before a great *porte-cochère*. "We're actually here at last. See! There goes Clive Standish up the steps with the Polissen girls and old Mr. Polissen. There are a *few* real human beings here, after all. Why do you suppose——?"

"H'm!" commented Greer, "Polissen's 'long' on Interstate Canal, the route Conover's C. G. & X. Road is threatening to put out of business. But why young Standish——"

"Why not? Letty Conover's own nephew. Though I did hear he and the Conovers were scarcely on speaking terms. He——"

"I fancy that's because Standish's 'Mayflower' back is too stiff to bend at the crack of Caleb's whip. He could have made a mighty good thing of his law business if Conover had backed him. But I understand he refuses to ally himself with his great relative-in-law, and prefers a good social position and a small law practice——"

"Rather than go to Congress?" finished his wife with such sweet innocence that Greer could only glare at her with flabby helplessness. Before he could think of an apt retort, the brougham was at the foot of the endless marble steps, and its late occupants were passing up a wide strip of velvet between rows of vividly liveried footmen.

Caleb Conover, Railroader, was standing just within the wide doorway of a drawing-room that seemed to stretch away into infinity. Behind rose an equally infinite vista of heads and shoulders. But the loudly blended murmur of many voices that is the first thing to strike the ear of arriving guests at such functions was conspicuously absent. The scarce-broken hush that spread through the chain of rooms seemed to bear out still further Mrs. Greer's mortuary simile.

But the constraint in no way extended to the host himself. The strong, alert face, with its shrewd light eyes and humorous mouth, was wreathed in welcoming smiles that seemed to ripple in a series of waves from the close-cut reddish hair to the ponderous iron jaw. The thickset form of the Railroader, massive of shoulder and sturdily full of limb, was ever plunging forward to grip some favored newcomer by the hand, or darting to one side or the other as he whispered instructions to servant or relative.

"I congratulate you on your friend's repose of manner!" whispered Mrs. Greer, as she and her husband awaited their turn. "He has all the calm self-assurance of a jumping jack."

"But there are springs of chilled steel in the jumping jack," whispered Greer. "He's out of his element, and he knows it. But he isn't so badly confused for all that. If you saw him at a convention or a board meeting, you wouldn't know him for the same——"

"And there's his poor little wife, looking as much like a rabbit as ever! She's a cipher here; and even her husband's figure in front of her doesn't raise the cipher to the tenth power. I suppose that is the daughter, to Mrs. Conover's left? The slender girl with the rust-colored hair and the brown eyes? She's prettier and more of a thoroughbred in looks than I should have——"

" That's not his daughter. That's Miss Lanier, Conover's secretary. His daughter is the——"

" His secretary? Why, is she receiving? "

" She is his secretary and everything else. She came here three years ago as Blanche's governess. To give the poor girl a sort of winding-up polish before Caleb sent her to Europe. She made all sorts of a hit with Conover. Principally because she's the only person on earth who isn't afraid of him, so I hear. And now she is secretary, and major domo, and ' right-hand man,' and I don't know what not else. Mrs. Conover's only a ' cipher,' as you say, and Miss Alice Lanier —not Caleb—is the ' figure ' in front of her. That's the new-made princess, to the right. The tall one with the no-colored hair. I suppose that's the Prince d'Antri beside her."

" He's too handsome to be a very real prince. What a face for a sculptor or——"

" Or a barber. A beard like that——"

A gorgeously apparelled couple just in front of the Greers, in the line, moved forward within the zone of Conover's greeting. Caleb nodded patronizingly to the man, and more civilly to the woman.

" Mr. Conover," the latter was murmuring in an anguish of respectful embarrassment, " 'tis a great honor you do me and the man, askin' us here to-night with all your stylish friends, an'——"

"Oh, there's more than your husband and me, here, who'd get hungry by habit if they heard a noon whistle blow," laughed Conover, as with a jerk of his red head and a word of pleasant welcome, he passed them on down the reception line. Then the Railroader's light, deep-set eyes fell on Greer, and he stepped forward, both hands outstretched.

"Good evening, Greer!" he cried, and there was a subcurrent of latent power in his hearty voice. "Good evening! Pleased to see you in my house. Mrs. Greer, I presume? Most kind of you to come, ma'am. Proud to make your acquaintance. Letty!"—summoning with a jerk of the head an overdressed, frightened-looking little woman from the line behind him—"Letty, this is my very good friend, Mr. Talbot Firth Greer—Mrs. Conover—Mr. and Mrs. Greer. Mr. Greer is the next Congressman from the Eleventh District. (That's a little prophecy, Mr. Greer. You can gamble on its coming true.) My daughter, Princess d'Antri—Mr. and Mrs. Greer. Prince Amadeo d'Antri. My secretary, Miss Anice Lanier—Mr. and Mrs.——"

A new batch of guests swarmed down the

hall toward the host, and the ordeal was over. The Greers, swept on in the rush, did not hear Conover's next greeting. This was rather a pity, since it differed materially from that lavished upon themselves.

Its recipient was a big young man, with a shock of light hair and quiet, dark eyes. He wore his clothes well, and looked out of place in his vulgar, garish surroundings. Caleb Conover, Railroader, eyed the newcomer all over with a cold, expressionless glance. A glance that no seer on earth could have read; the glance that had gained him more than one victory when wits and concealment of purpose were rife. Then he held out a grudging hand.

"Well, Mr. Clive Standish," he observed, "it seems the lion and the lamb lie down together, after all—a considerable distance this side of the millennium. And the lamb inside, at that. To think of a clubman and a cotillon leader, and a first-families scion and a Civic Leaguer and all that sort of thing condescending to honor my poor shanty——"

"My aunt, Mrs. Conover, wrote, asking me especially to come, as a favor to her," replied the younger man stiffly. "I thought——"

"And you were O. K. in thinking it. I know Letty wrote, because I dictated the letter. I wanted to count you in with the rest to-night, and I had a kind of bashful fear that your love for me, personally, might not be strong enough to fetch you. You've got too much sense to think the invite will score either way in our feelings to each other, or that I'm going back on what I said to you four years ago. Now that you're here, chase in and enjoy yourself. This place is like heaven, to-night, in one way. You'll see a whole lot of people here you never expected to, and you'll miss more'n a few you thought would sure belong. Good-by. Don't let me block your job of heavenly recognition."

The wilful coarseness and brutality of the man came as no surprise to Standish. He had expected something of the sort, and had braced himself for it. To please his aunt, whom he sincerely pitied, he had entered the Conover house to-night for the first time since the Homeric quarrel, incident on his refusal to avail himself of Caleb's prestige in his law work, and, incidentally to enroll himself as one of the Railroader's numberless political vassals. That the roughness to which Conover had just subjected him was no more a part of the former's real nature than had been the nervous effusiveness of his greeting to the Greers, Clive well knew. It had been intended to cover any embarrassing memories of a former and somewhat less strained acquaintanceship; and as such it—like most of Conover's moves—had served its turn.

So, resisting his first impulse to depart as he had come, Standish moved on. The formal receiving phalanx was crumpling up. He paused for a moment's talk with little Mrs. Conover, exchanged a civil word or two with his cousin Blanche and her prince, and then came to where Anice Lanier was trying to make conversation for several awed-looking, bediamonded persons who were evidently horribly ill at ease in their surroundings.

At sight of the girl, the formal lines about Clive's mouth were broken by a smile of very genuine pleasure. A smile that gave a younger aspect to his grave face, and found ready answer in the brown eyes that met his.

" Haven't you toiled at a forlorn hope long enough? " he asked, as the awed beings drifted away into the uncomfortable crowd, carrying their burden of jewels with them.

" A forlorn hope? " she queried, puzzled.

" You actually seemed to be trying to galvanize at least a segment of this portentous gathering into a semblance of life. Don't do it. In the first place you can't. Saloon-keepers and Pompton Avenue people won't blend. In the second place, it isn't expected of you. The papers to-morrow will record the right names just as jealously as if every one had had a good time. Suppose you concentrate all your efforts on me. Come! It will be a real work of charity. For Mr. Conover has just shown me how thoroughly I'm the prodigal. And he didn't even hint at the whereabouts of a fatted calf. Please be merciful and make me have a good time. It's months since I've seen you to talk to."

"Then why don't you come here oftener?" she asked, as they made their way through the press, and found an unoccupied alcove between two of the great rooms. "I'm sure Mrs. Conover——"

"My poor aunt? She'd be frightened to death that Conover and I would quarrel. No, no! To-night is an exception. The first and the last. I persuaded myself I came because of Aunt Letty's note. But I really came for a chat with you."

She looked at him, doubting how to accept this bald compliment. But his face was boyish in its sincerity.

"You and I used to be such good friends," he went on, "and now we never see any more of each other. Why don't we?"

"I think you know as well as I. You no longer come here—you have not come, I think, since a year before I arrived. And I go almost nowhere since——"

"Since you gave up all your old world and the people who cared for you and became a drudge in the Conover household? If you were to be found anywhere else, you would see so much of me that I'd bore you to extinction. But it would be even unpleasanter for you than for me if I were to call on you here. I miss our old-time talks more than I can say."

"I miss them, too. Do you remember how we used to argue over politics, and how you always ended by telling me that there were two things no woman could understand, and that politics was one and finance the other?"

"And you would always make the same retort: That woman's combined ignorance of politics and finance were pure knowledge as compared with the men's ignorance of women. It wasn't especially logical repartee, but it always served to shut me up."

"I wish we had time for another political spat. Some day we must. You see, I've learned such a lot about politics—and finance, too—*practical* politics and finance—since I came here."

"Decidedly 'practical,' I fancy, if Mr. Conover was your teacher. He doesn't go in much for idealism."

"And you?" asked Anice, ignoring the slur. "Are you still as rabid as ever in your ideas of reform? But, of course, you are. For I read only last week that you had been elected President of the Civic League. I want to congratulate you. It's a splendid movement, even though Mr. Conover declares it's hopeless."

"Good citizenship is never quite hopeless, even in a boss-ridden community like Granite, and a boss-governed commonwealth like the Mountain State. The people will wake up some day."

"Their snores sound very peaceful and regular just now," remarked Anice, with a flippancy whereof she had the grace to be ashamed.

"Perhaps," he smiled, "the sounds you and Conover mistake for snores may possibly be groans."

"How delightfully dramatic! That would sound splendidly on the stump."

"It may have a chance to."

"What do you mean? Are you going to——"

"No. I am going to run for governor this fall."

"WHAT?"

"Do you know," observed Standish, "when you open your eyes that way you really look——"

"Never mind how I look! Tell me about——"

"My campaign? It is nothing yet. But the Civic League is planning one more effort to shake off Conover's grip on the throat of the Mountain State—another good 'stump' line, by the way. And I have been asked to run for governor."

"But——"

"Oh, yes, I know. Conover holds the Convention in the hollow of his hand. He owns the delegates and the newspapers and the Legislature as well as the railroads. And no sane man would dream of bucking such a combination. But maybe I'm not quite sane. For I'm going to try it. Now laugh all you like."

"Laugh? I feel more like crying. It's—it's knightly and *splendid* of you, Clive! And—perhaps it may prove less crazy than you think."

"You mean?"

"I mean nothing at all. I wish you luck, though. All the luck in the world. Tell me more."

"There is no more. Besides, I'd rather talk about *you*. Tell me of your life here."

"There's nothing to tell. It's work. Pleasant enough work, even though it's hard. Everyone is nice to me. I——"

" That doesn't explain your choosing such a career out of all that were open to you. Why did you take it? "

" I've often explained it to you, but you never seem to understand. When father died, he left me nothing. I had my living to make, and——"

" But surely there were a thousand easier, pleasanter ways of earning it than to kill yourself socially by becoming an employee in such a family as this. It can't be congenial——"

The odd smile in her eyes checked him and gave him a vague sense of uneasiness.

" It *is* congenial," said the girl after a pause. " I have my own suite of rooms, my own hours, my own way. I have a natural bent for finance, and business association with Mr. Conover is a real education. The salary is good. My word in all household matters is law. Mr. Conover knows I understand how things should be conducted, and he has grown to rely on me. I am more mistress here than most women in their own homes. Mrs. Conover is ill so much—and Blanche being away——"

" Anice," he broke in, " I've known you since you first went into long dresses. And I know that the reasons you've just given are none of them the sort that appeal to a girl like you. To some women they might. But not to you. Why did you come here, and why do you stay? There is some reason you haven't——"

"'Scuse me, Miss Lanier," said a voice at the entrance of the alcove, "the Boss sent me to ask you would you come to the drorin'-room. He says the supper-room's open, an' he'd like you to soop'rintend things. I've been lookin' everywhere for you. Gee, but goin' through a bunch of cops in a pool-room raid is pie alongside of workin' a way through this push."

The speaker was a squat, swarthy little man on whom his ready-made evening clothes sat with the grace and comfort of a set of thumb screws. Clive recognized him with difficulty as the usually self-assured "Billy" Shevlin, Conover's most trusted political henchman.

"Very well," replied Anice Lanier, rising to obey the summons. She noted the dumb misery in Billy's face, and paused to ask:

"Aren't you having a good time, Mr. Shevlin?"

"A good time? *Me?* Oh, yes. *Sure*, I am. I only hope no one'll mistake me in this open-face suit for a senator or a matti-nay idol. That's all that's botherin' me. I've been rubbin' elbows with the Van Alstynes that own half of Pompton Av'no and live in Yoorup, and with Slat Kerrigan's wife, who used to push coffee and sinkers at Kerry's beanery. Oh, I'm in sassiety all right. An' I feel like a pair of yeller shoes at a fun'ral."

"Never mind!" laughed Anice. "The supper-room's open, and you'll enjoy that part of the evening, at any rate."

"I will, eh? Not me, Miss! The Boss's passed the word that the boys is to hold back, and kind of make a noise like innercent bystanders till the swell push is all fed. So it's me for the merry outskirts while they're gettin' their money's wort'."

Clive Standish watched them thread their way through the crowd, until Anice's dainty little head with its crown of shimmering bronze hair was lost to sight. Then he sat looking moodily out on the heterogeneous, ill-assorted company before him.

Now that he had talked with Anice he no longer regretted the impulse that had led him to accept Mrs. Conover's invitation. The girl had always exerted a subtle charm, a nameless influence, over him. Years before, when he was struggling, penniless, to make a living in a city where his family name opened every door to him, yet where it was more of an impediment than otherwise in his task of bread winning; even then he had worked with a vague, half-formed hope of Anice Lanier sharing his final victory.

Then had come her own financial reverses, her father's death, and her withdrawal from the world that had known them both. Since that time circumstances had checked their growing intimacy. It was pleasant to Standish to feel that that intimacy and understanding were now renewed almost just where they had left off. His battle for livelihood and success had beaten from him much of the buoyancy that had once been his charm. Anice seemed the one link connecting him with Youth—the link whereby he might one day win his way back to that dear lost country of his boyish hopes and dreams. It would be good to forget, with her, the dreary uphill struggle that was so bitter and youth-sapping when endured alone. Then he laughed grimly at his own silly fantasy, and came back to every-day self-control.

The rooms were clearing. Clive got to his feet and followed the general drift toward the enormous ball-room in the rear of the mansion that had for the occasion been converted into a banquet hall.

On the way he encountered a long, lean, pasty-faced young man who hailed him with a weary:

"Hello, Standish! Didn't expect to see you here. Beastly bore, isn't it? And the governor dragged me all the way from New York to show up at it."

"You spend most of your time in New York nowadays, don't you, Jerry?" said Clive.

"Say, old chap," protested young Conover, "cut out the 'Jerry,' can't you? My Christian name's Gerald. 'Jerry' was all right enough when I was a kid in this one-horse provincial hole. But it would swamp a man of my standing in New York."

Clive had a fair idea of the "standing" in question. A half-baked lad, turned out of Harvard after two years of futile loafing, sent on a trip around the world (that culminated in a delightfully misspent year in Paris), at last coming home with a well-grounded contempt for his native city, and turned loose at his own request on long-suffering New York, with more money than belonged to him and fewer brains than sufficed to keep it. This in a nutshell was the history—so far as the world at large knew—of Caleb Conover's only son.

From time to time newspaper accounts of beaten cabmen, suppers that ended in police stations, and similar feats of youthful gayety and culture had floated to Granite. Yet Caleb Conover, otherwise so rigid in the matter of appearances, read such accounts with relish, and boasted loudly of the swath his son was cutting in Gotham society. For, on Gerald's word, Conover was firmly assured that this was the true career of a young man of fashion. It represented all he had missed in his own poverty-fighting early manhood, and he rejoiced in his son's good times.

Getting rid of Gerald as soon as he decently might, Standish made his way to the supper-room. At a hundred tables sat more or less bored guests. Waiters swirled wildly to and fro. In a balcony above blared an orchestra. At the doors and in a fringe about the edges of the room were grouped the Conover political and business hangers on. The place was hot to suffocation and heavy with the scent of flowers.

Suddenly, through the volume of looser sound, came a succession of sharp raps. The orchestra stopped short. The guests ceased speaking, and craned their necks.

At the far end of the room, under a gaudy floral piece, a man had risen to his feet.

"Speech!" yelled Shevlin, enthusiastically, from a doorway. Then, made aware of his breach of etiquette by a swift but awful glance from his chief, he wilted behind a palm.

But Shevlin had read the signs aright.

Caleb Conover, Railroader, was about to make a speech.

CHAPTER II

CALEB CONOVER MAKES A SPEECH

Conover had broken, that night, two rules that had for years formed inviolate tenets of his life creed. In the first place, he—whose battles had for the most part been won by the cold eye that told nothing, and by the colder brain that dictated the words of his every-day speech as calculatingly as a diplomat dictates a letter of state—he had forced himself to throw away his guard and to chatter and make himself agreeable like any bargain counter clerk. The effort had been irksome.

In the second, he had departed from his fixed habit of total abstinence. The love of strong drink ran high in his blood. Early in life he had decided that such indulgence would militate against success. So he had avoided even the mildest potations from thenceforward. To-night (his usually stolid nerves tense with the excitement of the grand cast he was making for "social recognition") he had felt, as never before in campaign or in business climax, the need for stimulant to enable him to play his awkward rôle. Moreover—he had his son, Gerald's, high authority for the statement—total abstinence was no longer in vogue among the elect.

As soon, therefore, as he had taken his seat in the supper-room he had braced himself by a glass of champagne. The unwonted beverage sent a delicious glow through him. His puzzled brain cleared, his last doubts of the entertainment's success began to fade.

An obsequious waiter at his elbow hastened to refill the glass, and Conover, his eyes darting hither and thither among the guests to single out and dwell on the various faces he had so long and so vainly yearned to see in his house, absent-mindedly emptied it and another after it. He was talking assiduously to Mrs. Van Alstyne, whom at first he had found somewhat frigid and difficult; but who, he now discovered to his surprise, it was growing momentarily easier to entertain. He had had no idea of his own command of language.

Supper was still in its early stages when a fourth glass of heady vintage champagne followed the other three. From doorways and walls his political followers looked on with amaze. To them the sight of the Boss drinking was the eighth wonder of the world. They nudged each other and muttered awed comments out of the corners of their mouths.

But Caleb heeded this not at all. He was happy. Very happy. The party over which he had suffered such secret qualms and to secure the desired guests for which he had strained every atom of his vast political and business influence, was proving a marvellous success. At last he was in society. And he had thought the barriers of that Body so impassable! He was in society. At last. And talking with delightful, brilliant fluency with one of its acknowledged leaders. He had conquered.

The waiter filled his glass for the fifth time. After all, champagne had an effect whiskey could never equal. The fifth draught (for he allowed but one swallow to the goblet) seemed to inspire him even more than had its predecessors.

Then it was that fifty generations of Irishmen who, under the spell of liquor, acquired a flow of language not their own, clamored for voice in this their latest and greatest descendant. Now that he was in so foreign, brilliant a mood, what more apt than a graceful little speech of greeting to those his fellow-townsmen who had flocked thither to do him honor? The idea was sublime. Conover rose to his feet and rapped for silence. He would speak while the gift of eloquence was still strong upon him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Caleb, clearing his voice and looking down the great room across the concourse of wondering, amused, or expectant faces that gently swayed in a faint haze before his eyes, "I guess you all know, without my telling you, how glad I am to see you here to-night, and I want you should enjoy every minute of your evening. Some of you are old friends of mine. There's more'n a few here to-night that remembers me when I was barefooted Cale Conover, without a dollar to my name nor any very hectic prospects of getting one.

"But there's a lot more of you here that I hadn't the honor of knowing then, nor for that matter of meeting at all till to-night. It's to these, mostly, that I'm talking now. For I want 'em to know me better and like me better. Maybe if they hear more about me they will. That's why I'm on my feet now.

"I b'lieve it isn't customary to make a speech any more at parties. But you'll have to forgive me. I'm not much onto the latest frills and fashions. But give me a chance, and I'll learn as easy as a Chinaman. It came to me all of a sudden to say what I've got to say, right here and now, even if it's at the expense of a little etiquette. I've asked you here to-night, mainly, of course, for the pleasure of entertaining you, and I hope you're all having a real good time. But I had another reason, too."

The men at the tables looked perplexed. Was this the Caleb Conover they had met and cringed to in the outer world, this garrulous, rambling man with the flushed face?

"You see, I've come to be a kind of a feature of this city of ours and of the State, too. I'm here to stay. And I want that my townsfolks and my fellow-residents of the Mountain State should know me. Many of 'em do. There's a full half-million folks in this city and State that know all about Caleb Conover. They know he's on the square, that he'll look after their interests, that he's a white man. They know he's a man they can trust in their public life and welcome in their homes. And, as I said, there's a lot of these people here to-night.

"But there's a lot of other folks here who only know me by what slander and jokes they've picked up around town or in the out-of-State newspapers. It's these latter folks I'm talking to now. I want them to know the *real* me; not the uneducated crook and illiterate feller my p'litical enemies have made me out. They can't think I'm *all* bad, or they wouldn't be my guests. Would they, now? And a little frankness ought to do the rest.

"Some people say I've risen from the gutter. Well, I've *risen* from it, haven't I? A lot of men on Pompton Avenue and in the big clubs are just where they started when they were born. Not a step in advance of where their fathers left 'em. Swell chance *they'd* have had if their parents had started 'em in the gutter as mine did, wouldn't they? Where'd they be now?

"What does the start amount to? The finish line's where the score's counted. Gutter or palace.

"'A man's a man for a' that,' says a poet by the name of R. Burns. And he was right, even if he did waste his time on verse-stringing. Only it always seemed a pity to me those words wasn't said by someone bigger'n a measly poet. Someone whose name carried weight, and whose words would be quoted more. Because then more folks might hear of it and believe it. I don't suppose one person in fifty's ever heard of this R. Burns person. (I never did, myself, till I bought a Famous Quotation book to use in one of my campaigns. That's how I got familiar with the writings of R. Burns and Ibid and Byron and all those rhymer people.) Now, if some public character like Tom Platt, or Matt Quay, or someone else that everybody's heard of, had said that quotation about a man being a man——"

Caleb paused to gather up the loose threads of his discourse. This caused him a moment of dull bewilderment, for he was not accustomed to digress, either in mind or talk, and the phenomenon puzzled him. He rallied and went on:

"But that isn't the point. I was telling you about myself. I started in the gutter, just as the 'knockers' say I did. Or down by the freight yards, and that's about the same thing. My mother took in washing—when she could get it. My father went to the penitentiary for freight-lifting when I was ten—he was a stevedore—and he died there. I was brought up on a street where the feller—man or boy—who couldn't fight had to stay indoors. And indoors was one place I never stayed. I began as coal boy in the C. G. & X. elevators; then I got a job firing on a fast freight, and from that I took to braking on a local passenger run. Then I was yardmaster, and then in the sup'rintendent's office, and then came the job of sup'rintendent and after that general manager, and I worked my way up till I ran the C. G. & X. road single-handed. Meantime I was looking after your city's interests. Three times as Alderman and then once as Mayor, for the boys knew they could bank on me. I got hold of interests here and interests there. Cheap, run-down interests they were, for the most part, but I built 'em up. Take the C. G. & X., for instance. Biggest road in the State to-day. How'd it get so? *I* made it. It was all run down, and on its last legs when I took hold. I acquired it and——"

He paused once more, fighting back that queer tendency to let slip his grasp on his subject.

"I remember that C. G. & X. deal," whispered Greer to his wife. "He juggled shares and pulled wires and spread calamity rumors till he was able to smash the stock down to a dollar-ten per. He scared out all the other big holders, gobbled their stock, reorganized, and reaped a clean five million on the deal."

"Hush!" retorted Mrs. Greer. "This is too rich to miss. I must remember it all, to——"

"—So, you see," Caleb was continuing, "I fought my way up. Every move was a fight, and every fight was a win. That's my motto. Fight to win. An' if you *don't* win, let it be your executor, not you, that knows you lost. But the biggest fight of all was to come. I controlled the city. I helped control the

State. I had all the money any man needed, and I was spending it right here in the town where it was earned. I was a successful man. But the man who's satisfied with success would be satisfied with failure. And I wasn't satisfied.

" There was still one thing I couldn't get. I couldn't get one set of people to recognize me when they met me in the street, to ask me to their houses, to come to *my* house. Why? I don't know. Maybe *they* don't know. Maybe they didn't *want* to know. There's a lot of things society folks don't seem to want to know. And one of those things was me. I couldn't win 'em over. I built this house. Cost $200,000 more'n any other house in town. If you doubt it, step down to the Building Commissioner's and look over the specifications. Built it on the most fash'nable avenue, too. But still society wouldn't say: ' Pleased to know you! ' ' Maybe it's my lack of blue blood,' thinks I. ' Though my pile's been made a good deal cleaner than many an aristocrat's.' I married a lady of the first families here "—a ripple of unintelligible surprise broke in on his ears, but quickly died. " What was the result? She was asked out and I wasn't. But I kept on fighting. And at last I'm in the winning stride.

" I'm not a college man myself. All my education's hand-made and since I was thirty. But I was bound my son should be one. And he is. He's in society, too. The best New York affords, I'm told. My girl's had advantages, too, and you see the result. Do unto others what you can't do for yourself. That's worth remembering sometimes. And now at last I get my comeback for all my outlay.

" To-night I guess I cover the final lap of the race. For the bluest blood of Granite is —are—is among my guests here, and I'm meeting 'em on equal terms. All this talk, maybe, isn't what the etiquette books call ' good form.' But if you knew how many years I've worked for what I've won to-night, you'd sympathize with me for wanting to crow just a little."

" Heavens! " murmured Mrs. Greer, " does the creature think anyone's going to regard this as his ' début '? And the awful part of it is, the whole speech will be in every paper to-morrow. Oh, if only the reporters will get our names wrong! "

" No fear of that," answered Greer. " The typewritten list is probably being put in print even now. But what ails Conover? "

" So," resumed Caleb, beaming about him, " I wanted the chance to let you all know me as I really am. Not what my enemies say about me. Is there any reason why I shouldn't be your friend and entertain you often? None in the least, you'll all say. It seems a little thing, perhaps, to you who've been in the game always. But it's meant a lot to me!"

He paused. There seemed nothing more to say, yet he longed to end with a climax. A glorious, dazzling inspiration came, and he hurried on:

"And now, in honor of this little meeting between friends, let me tell you all a secret. It won't be a secret to-morrow, but you can always be able to say you were the first who was told. I have at last yielded to the earnest entreaties of my constituents and friends and party in general, and have consented to accept the nomination for Governor at the coming convention."

From the proletariat fringing the walls and blocking the doorway arose an excited, exultant hum. Only the wild efforts of certain efficient, if unofficial, sergeants-at-arms prevented a mighty yell of applause. At the tables, however, the women looked bored or puzzled; while the men glanced at each other with the blank look of people who, out for a day's jolly hunting, find themselves caught unexpectedly in a bear trap.

"Good Lord!" grunted Greer, "I hope our being here doesn't commit any of us! To think of Conover, of all men, as governor! This'll be a bombshell with a vengeance."

"I have heretofore," went on Caleb, after allowing the impression of his words to sink in, "refused all State offices. But now I feel it a social as well as a political duty that I owe. And I shall be grateful to you for your honest support."

He had rehearsed this last sentence many times for campaign speeches. It seemed to him to have the true oratorical ring, and to be singularly appropriate. He prepared to sit down, then checked himself.

"Some men," he added, as an afterthought, "are in politics for a 'holy' purpose. Some for what's in it for them. I find the result's usually pretty much the same in both cases. As governor I shall do my best for Granite and for the Mountain State. Thank you."

Caleb bowed, reseated himself and swallowed another glass of champagne at a gulp. He was not ill pleased with himself. He had risen merely to thank his guests for their presence. Little by little he had drifted further than he had at first intended. Yet, he was glad he had yielded to this unprecedented, unaccustomed yearning to expand; to show himself at his best before these people with whom he now firmly believed himself on a footing of friendly equality. Yes, on the whole, he was convinced of his success.

He glanced about him. The buzz of talk had recommenced; it seemed to him more loudly, more interestedly, with less of constraint than before. Dozens of eyes were upon him, not with the bored coldness of the earlier evening, but with curiosity and open interest. He had put people at their ease. They were accepting him as one of themselves, and behaving as he had heard they did at other functions.

Caleb was glad.

Then his complacent glance fell on his wife. She was very red in the face, and was bending over her plate, eating fast.

" Proud of the old man, poor little thing! " mused Conover, a twinge of affection for his scared, invertebrate spouse sending a softer light into his strenuous, lean face. His gaze next travelled to Blanche, his daughter. She, too, was red of face, and was talking hard, as if against time. Somehow Caleb was less assured as to the cause of her flush. Perhaps in Europe such speeches were not customary. He could explain to her later.

Anice Lanier, alone, met his eye with the frank, honest, unafraid look that was her birthright, and which made her the only living person he instinctively felt he could not bully. In her look he read, now, a mute question. He could not fathom the expression.

Caleb left his place and made his way among the tables to where she sat.

"How'd it go?" he asked. "It seemed to take 'em."

"I think it did," she replied, noting the flush on his cheek and the brightness of his gaze, and wondering thereat.

"Wasn't too long to hold their interest?"

"No. They seemed interested."

"You think so? Good! Do you know, if I'd had time to think, I'd rather have made fifty campaign speeches than that one. I'd have been rattled to death. But it was easier than any speech I ever made. Good climax, eh, that announcement?"

"How long ago did you make up your mind to run for Governor?"

"Think it's queer that, as my secretary, you hadn't heard of it? Well, I'll tell you. I decided it just about seven minutes ago. It came to me like a flash, plumb in the middle of my speech. I figgered out all at once that if there was any flaw in my plans so far, the governorship was dead sure to cinch me in society. Folks'll think twice before they turn up their noses at a governor. It came as an inspiration. A genuine hunch. I never have one of them but what it wins. Why, when——"

"But can you get the nomination?"

"Can I get it? *Can* I get it? Say, Miss Lanier, haven't you learned yet that there isn't a thing in the city of Granite or in the Mountain State that Caleb Conover, Railroader, can't get if he wants it bad enough? To-night ought to have showed you that. Why, with the legislature and every newspaper, and the railroad system and every decent State job right here safe between my fingers, all I've got to do is to turn the wheel, and the little ball will drop into the governor's chair all right, all right."

The girl's big brown eyes were vaguely troubled. The reserve habitual to her when in her employer's society deepened. She thought of Clive Standish and his aspirations. What would become of the young lawyer's already desperate hope, now that the Boss himself—and not some mere puppet of the latter's—was to be his opponent?

"Say," sighed Caleb Conover in perfect content, "this is the happiest night ever! I've got everything there is in life for a man. All the money I want, the running of the State, a place in society at last, a daughter that's a princess, a boy that's making his mark in the biggest city in America, and now

—the governorship. Lord! but I'm a lucky man. And that speech—I didn't think I had it in me. Of course, I know those snobs from the Pompton Avenue crowd were dragged here by the ears. I had to drag pretty hard, too, in most cases. But they're *here*. And they listened to me. They had to. And they can't ever look on me just as they did before."

"No," assented Anice, "they can't."

To her there was something impersonally pathetic in the way this usually keen, stern man had unbent and made himself ridiculous. She was the only person living in whose presence, as a rule, he expanded. She was used to the semi-occasional talkative, boastful moods of this Boss whom all the rest of the world deemed as sharp, and concise as a steel trap—and as deadly. Yet never had even she seen him like this before.

It was sad, she mused, that Samson, shorn of his locks of self-restraint and of his calculating coolness, should thus have made sport for the Philistines. That he had perhaps done so for a purpose—even though for once in his life it was a futile purpose—rendered his folly no less humiliating.

"Yes," reiterated Conover, as he prepared to return to his own table. "It was an inspiration. And an ounce of inspiration discounts a half-ton of any other commodity that ever passed over the counter."

"What was it like?" rhapsodized Billy Shevlin at 2 A.M., as he gazed loftily upon a semicircle of humbler querists in the back room of Kerrigan's saloon. "It was like the King of England an' one of them Fashion Joinals an' a lake of $4-a-bottle suds, all mixed; with a Letter Carriers' Ball on the side. And"—he added, in a glow of divine memories—"*I* was ace-high with the biggest of the push. If I hadn't a' been, would the Van Alstyne dame a' stood for it so civil when I treads on the train of her Sunday regalia and rips about ten yards of the fancy tatting off'n it?"

"What was it like?" echoed Mrs. Greer to a query of one of her daughters who had sat up to await the parental home-coming. "It was something clear outside the scriptural prohibition of swearing. For it was like nothing in 'the heavens above, or the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth.'"

"What was it like?" thought Clive Standish drowsily as he fell asleep. "A dozen people are certain to ask me that to-morrow. It—her—her eyes have that same old queer way—of making me feel as if—I were in church."

CHAPTER III

CALEB CONOVER REGRETS

Caleb Conover, Railroader, was in a humor when all the household thought well to tread softly.

It was the morning after his "début." He paced his study intermittently, stopping now and again at a window to watch laborers at work in the grounds below, dismantling the strings of Chinese lanterns, and carting away other litter of the festivities. A pile of newspapers filled one of the study chairs. On the front page of each local journal was blazoned a garish account of the Conover reception. Yet Caleb, eager as he had once been to read every word concerning the fête, had not so much as glanced at any of the papers. In fact, he seemed, in his weary pacing to and fro, to avoid the locality of the chair where they lay.

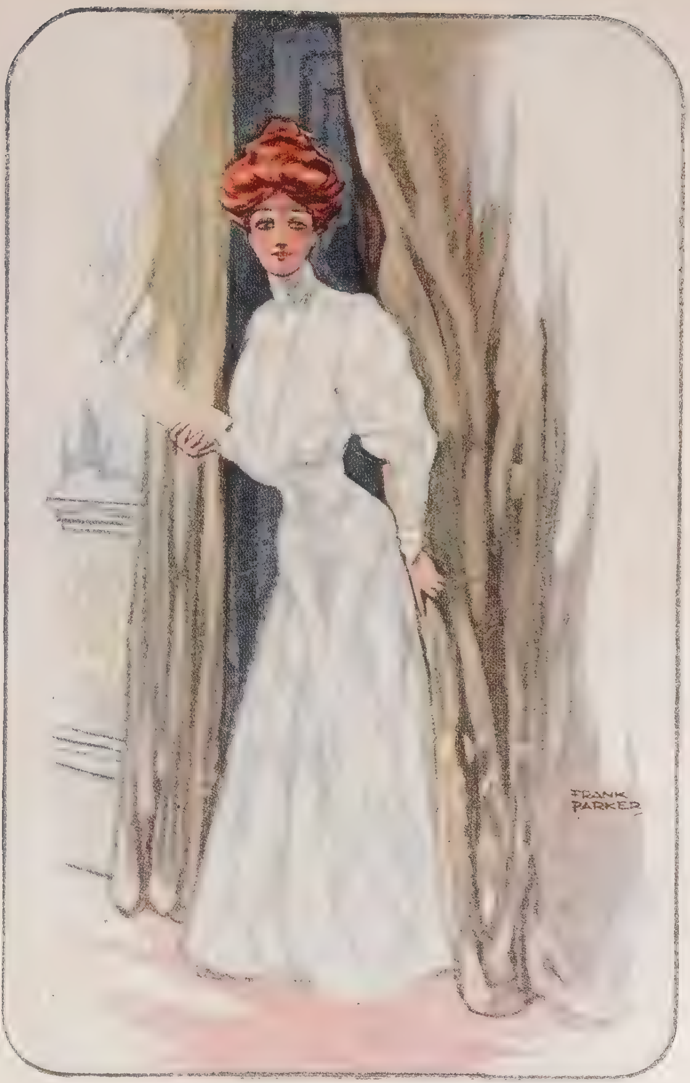
For an hour—in fact, ever since he had left his bedroom—he had paced thus. And none had dared disturb him. For the evil spirit was heavy upon Saul, and the javelin of wrath, at such times, was not prone to tarry in its flight.

Caleb's black mood this morning came from within, not from objective causes. He was travelling through that deepest, most horrible of all the multi-graded Valleys of Humiliation—the Vale of Remembered Folly. Let a man recall a crime, and—especially if he be troubled at the time with indigestion—remorse of a smug if painful sort will be his portion. Let him recall a misfortune, and a wave of gentle, self-pitying grief will lave his heart, soothing the throb of an old sting into soft regret. But let him awake to the fact that he has made himself sublimely ridiculous—and that in the presence of the multitude—and his self-torture can be lashed to a pitch that shames the Inquisition's most zealous efforts. Therein lies the True Valley of Humiliation, the ravine where no sunlight of redeeming circumstances shines, where no refreshing rill of excuse and palliation flows. And it was in this unrelieved, arid gorge of self-contempt that Caleb Conover now wallowed.

He had made a fool of himself. An arrant fool. He had drunk until he was drunken. And in that drunkenness he had spoken blatant words of idiocy. He had made himself ridiculous in the eyes of the very class he had sought to cultivate. His had not been the besottedness that babbles, sleeps and forgets. Even as his drink-inspired tongue had betrayed no thickness nor hiatus during his drivelling speech, so the steady brain had, on waking, remorselessly told him of his every word.

Thirty years before, in a drunken spree, he had been seized with a fervor of patriotism and had enlisted in the army. On coming to himself it had cost him nearly every dollar he possessed to get himself free. After a similar revel, a year later, he had stampeded a meeting of the local " machine " by making a tearful speech in favor of reform and purity in politics. The oration had cost him his immediate chances of political preferment. After that he had done away with this single weakness in his iron nature and had drunk no more. The sacrifice had been light for so strong a man, once he forced himself to make it.

Last night—secure in his impregnable self-trust—he had broken his inviolable rule. As a result he had become a laughing-stock for the people whose favor he so unspeakably desired to win. As to his own adherents, he gave their possible opinions not one thought. Whatever the Boss said " went " with them. Had he declared himself a candidate for holy


FRANK
PARKER

She was very pretty and dainty and young, in her simple white morning frock. Page 47.

orders, or blurted out the innermost secrets of the "machine," they would probably have believed he was acting for the best. But those others——!

And, over and above all, his declaration of candidacy for Governor——

A knock at the door of his study broke in on the audible groan of self-contempt this last and ever-recurrent thought wrung from his tight lips. Caleb stopped midway down the room, his short red hair bristling with fury at the interruption.

"What do you want?" he snarled.

The door opened and Anice Lanier came in. She was very pretty and dainty and young, in her simple white morning frock. She carried a set of tablets whereon it was her custom to transcribe notes of Caleb's morning instructions for reference or for later amplification by his two stenographers.

"Well!" roared Conover, glowering across the room at her, "what in hell do *you* want?"

"To tender my resignation," was the unruffled reply.

"Your *what?*" he gasped, stupidly.

"My resignation," in the same level, impersonal tones. "To take effect at once. Good morning."

She was half-way out of the room before

her employer could hurry after and detain her.

"What's—what's the meaning of this?" asked Caleb, the brutal belligerency trailing out of his voice. Then, before she could answer, he added: "Because I spoke like that just now? Was that it? Because I said— And you'd throw over a good job just because of a few cranky words? Yes, I believe you would. You'd do it. It isn't a bluff. Maybe that's why you make such a hit with me, Miss Lanier. You're not scared every time I open my mouth. And you stand up for yourself."

He eyed her in a quizzically admiring fashion, as one might a beautiful but unclassified natural history specimen. She made no reply, but stood waiting in patience for him to move from between her and the door.

Caleb grinned.

"Want me to apologize, I s'pose?" he grumbled.

"A gentleman would not wait to ask."

"Maybe you think a gentleman wouldn't of said what I did, in the first place, eh?"

"Yes, I do think so. Don't you?"

"Well, I'm sorry. Let it go at that. Now let's get to work. Say"—as they moved across to their wonted places at the big centre table, "you oughtn't to take offence at anything about me this morning. You must know how sore I am."

"What's the matter?"

"As if you didn't know! You saw how many kinds of a wall-eyed fool I made of myself last night. Isn't that enough to make a man sore? And to think of it being taken down by those newspaper idiots and printed all over the country!"

He gave the nearby chair a kick, avalanching the morning papers to the floor.

"Have you read those?" queried Anice.

"No. Why should I rub it in? I know what they——"

"Why not look at them before you lose your temper?"

Caleb snatched up the *Star*, foremost journal of Granite. He glanced down the last column of the front page, and over to the second.

"Here's the story of the show just as we dictated it beforehand," he commented. "List of guests— Where in thunder is that measly speech? Have they given it a column to itself? Oh—way down at the bottom. 'In a singularly happy little informal address at the close of the evening Mr. Conover mentioned his forthcoming candidacy for governor.' Is that all any of them have got about it?"

"They have your pledge to run for Governor blazoned over two columns of the front page of nearly all the papers. But nothing more about the speech itself."

"But how——"

"I took the liberty of stopping the reporters before they left the house, and telling them it would be against your wish for any of your other remarks to be quoted."

"You did that? Miss Lanier, you're fine! You've saved me a guying in every out-of-State paper in the East. I want to show my appreciation——"

"If that means another offer to raise my salary, I am very much obliged. But, as I've told you several times before, I can't accept it. Thank you just the same."

"But why not? I can afford——"

"But I can't. Don't let's talk of it, please."

"And every other soul in my employ spraining his brain to plan for a raise! The man who understands women—if he's ever born—won't need to read his Bible, for there'll be nothing that even the Almighty can teach him."

"Shan't we begin work? About this Fournier matter. He refuses to pay the $30,000, and we can't even get him to admit he owes it. Shall I——"

"Write and tell him unless he pays that $41,596 within thirty days——"

"But it's $30,000, not $41,000. He——"

"I know that. And he'll write us so by return mail. That'll give us the acknowledgment we want of the $30,000 debt. What next?"

"The Curtis-Bayne people of Hadley are falling behind on their contract with the C. G. & X."

"I guess they are," chuckled Caleb. "They're beginning to see a great light, just as I figured out. Well, let 'em squirm a bit."

"But the contract—you may remember Mr. Curtis asked to look at our copy of it when he was in Granite. He said he wanted to verify a clause he couldn't quite recollect. You told me to send it to him, and I did."

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, he never returned it. And this morning we get this letter from him: '*In regard to your favor of the 9th inst., in which you speak of a contract, we beg to state you must have confused us with some other of your road's customers. The Curtis-Bayne Company has no contract with the C. G. & X., and can find no record of one. If you have such a document kindly produce it.*'"

"Well, well, well!" gurgled Caleb. "To

think how that wicked old Curtis fox has imposed on my trust in human nature! He's got us, eh?"

"It looks so, I'm afraid."

"Looks so to him, too. It'll keep on looking so till I shove him into court and make him swear on the witness stand that no contract ever existed. Then it'll be time enough to produce the certified copy I had made just after I got his request to send the original to his hotel. Poor old Curtis! Please write him a very blustering, scared, appealing kind of letter. Next?"

"O'Flaherty's sent another begging note, about that claim of his against the road. It begins: '*Dear Mr. Conover: As you know, I've seen better days*'——"

"Tell him I can't be held accountable for the weather. And—say, Miss Lanier, let all the rest of this routine go over for to-day. I've a bigger game on, and I've got to hustle. That Governorship business——"

"Yes?"

"That was the foolest thing I ever did. It seemed to me at the minute a grand idea as a wind-up for my crazy speech. But I guess I'll have to pay my way all right before I'm done with last evening. The free list's suspended as far's I'm concerned."

"You mean there's some doubt of your

getting the nomination?" she asked, a sudden hope making her big eyes lustrous.

"Doubt? *Doubt?* Say, I thought you knew me better than that. Why, the nomination's right in front of me on a silver salver and trimmed with blue ribbons. And the election, too, for that matter."

"Then"—the hope dying—"why do you speak as you did just now?"

"It's this way: I've held Granite and the Mountain State by the nape of the neck for ten years. I'm the Boss. And when I give the word folks come to heel. But all this time I've been standing in the background while I pulled the strings. It was safer that way and pleasanter. I'd a lot rather write the play than be just a paid actor in it. But now I've got to jump out of my corner in the wings and take the centre of the stage. There's a lot more glory on the stage than in the wings, but there's lots more bad eggs and decayed fruit drifting in that direction, too. If the audience don't like the actor they hiss him. The man in the wings don't get any of that. All he has to do is to call off that actor and put on another the crowd'll like better, or maybe a new play if it comes to the worst.

"But here I'm to take the stage and get the limelight and the newspaper roasts—outside the State—and not an actor can I shunt it off on. That's why I've never took public office since I was Mayor. And then it was only a stepping-stone to the Leadership. Now I've got to leave the background and pose in the Capitol. There's nothing in it for me, except a better social position. That's a lot, I know. But I'm not so sure that even such a raise is worth the price."

"Then why not withdraw?"

"Not me! Withdraw, and be laughed at by my own crowd as well as the society click? It'd smash me forever. It's human nature to love a criminal and to hate a four-flusher. And cold feet ain't good for the circulation of the body politic. It's apt to end by freezing its possessor out. No, sir! I'm in it, and I got to swim strong. The nomination and the election's easy enough. But just a 'won handily' won't fill the bill. I've got to sweep the State with the all-firedest landslide ever slidden since U. S. Grant ran around the track twice before Horace Greeley got on speaking terms with his own stride. It's got to be a case of 'the all-popular Governor Conover.' I've got to go in on the shoulders of that rampant steed they call 'The Hoorah!' That'll settle forever any doubts of my fitness, and it'll stop all laughs at what I said last night. When a man's the people's unanimous choice, the few stray knocks that happen at intervals do him more good than harm. But if it was just touch-and-go, everybody'd be screeching about fraud and boss rule winning over honest effort. These Civic Leaguers are too noisy, as it is. I've got to start in right away."

"Any orders?"

"Yes. When you go down stairs, please send for Shevlin and Bourke and Raynor and the rest on this list, and telephone the editors I'd like to see 'em this afternoon. I'll have the ball rolling by night. Say, Miss Lanier, the campaign'll mean extra work for you. I want to make it worth your while. Come now, don't be silly. Let me make your salary——"

"I beg you won't speak of that any more. I cannot accept a raise of salary from you."

"But why not? You earn more and——"

"I earn all I get. And, as I've told you before, my reasons for accepting no larger stipend than you offered publicly for a governess for Blanche three years ago, are my own. I consider them good. I am glad to get the money I do. I believe I more than earn it. But I can accept no more, and I can take no presents nor favors of any sort from you. I can't explain to you my reasons. But I believe they are good."

"But it's so absurd! I——"

"Have you ever found me shirking my work or disloyal in any way to your interests, on account of the smallness of my salary? I have handled business and political secrets of yours that would have involved millions in loss to you if I had betrayed you. I have been loyal to those interests. I have done your work satisfactorily. I could have done no more on three times my pay. There let the matter rest, please."

"Just as you like!" grumbled Conover. "Lord! how the crowd'd stare if it heard Caleb Conover teasing anyone to take more of his money!"

"Money won't buy everything."

"No? Well, it gives a pretty big assortment to choose from. And——"

The door was flung unceremoniously open, and Gerald slouched in, his pasty face unwontedly sallow from last night's potations. For, with a few of the mushroom crop of the *jeunesse dorée* of Granite, he had prolonged the supper-room revels after the departure of the other guests.

"Hello, Dad!" he observed. "Thought I'd find you alone."

Caleb, his initial ill-temper softened by his talk with Anice, greeted his favorite child with a friendly nod.

"Sit down," he said. "I'll be at leisure in a few moments. And, say, throw that measly blend of burnt paper and Egyptian sweepings out of the window. Why a grown man can't smoke man's-sized tobacco is more'n I can see."

The lad, with sulky obedience, tossed away the cigarette and came back to the table.

"Hear the news?" he asked. "It seems you've got a rival for the nomination."

"Hey?"

"Grandin was telling me about it last night. His father's one of the big guns in the Civic League, you know. It seems the League's planning to spring Clive Standish on the convention."

"Clive Standish? That kid? For governor? Lord!"

"Good joke, isn't it? I——"

"Joke? *No!*" shouted Caleb. "It's just the thing I wouldn t have had happen for a fortune. He's poor, but he belongs to the oldest family in the State, and his blood so blue you could use it to starch clothes with. Just the sort of a visionary young fool a lot of cranks will gather around. He'll yell so loud about the 'people's sacred rights' and 'ring rule' and all that rot, that they'll hear him clear over in the other States. And when they do, the out-of-State papers will all get to hammering me again. And the very crowd I'm trying to score with, by running for Governor, will vote for him to a man. He's *one* of them."

"So you think he has a chance of winning?" asked Anice.

"Not a ghost of a chance. He'll die in the convention—if he ever reaches that far. But it will stir up just the opposition I've been telling you I was afraid of. Well, if it meant work before, it means a twenty-five-hour-a-day hustle now. I wish you'd telephone Shevlin and the others, please, Miss Lanier. Tell 'em to be here in an hour."

As the girl left the room, Caleb swung about to face his son. The glow of coming battle was in his face.

"Now's your chance, Jerry!" he began, hot with an enthusiasm that failed to find the faintest reflection in the sallow countenance before him. "Now's your chance to get back at the old man for a few of the things he's done for you."

"I—I don't catch your meaning," muttered Gerald, uncomfortably.

"You've got a sort of pull with a certain set of young addlepates here, because you live in New York and get your name in the papers, and because you've a dollar allowance to every penny of theirs: I want you to use that pull. I want you should jump right in and begin working for me. Why, you ought to round up a hundred votes in the Pompton Club alone, to say nothing of the youngsters on the fringe outside, who'll be tickled to death at having a feller of your means and position notice 'em. Yes, you can be a whole lot of help to me this next few weeks. Take off your coat and wade in! And when we win——"

"Hold on a moment, Dad!" interrupted Gerald, whose lengthening face had passed unnoted by the excited elder man. "Hold on, please. You mean you want me to work for you in the campaign for Governor?"

"Jerry, you'll get almost human one of these days if you let your intelligence take flights like that. Yes, I——"

"Because," pursued Gerald, who was far too accustomed to this form of sarcasm from his father to allow it to ruffle him, "because I can't."

"You—you—*what?*" grunted Caleb, incredulously.

"I can't stay here in Granite all that time. I—I must get back to New York this week. I've important business there."

"Well, I'll be—" gasped Conover, finding his voice at last, and with it the grim satire he loved to lavish on this son, so unlike himself. "Business, eh? 'Important business!' Some restaurant waiter you've got an appointment to thrash at 2.45 A.M. on Tuesday, or a hotel window you've made a date to drive through in a hansom? From all I've read or heard of your life there, those were the two most important pieces of business you ever transacted in New York. And it was *my* money paid the fines both times. No, no, Sonny, your 'important business' will keep, I guess, till after November. Anyhow, in the meantime you'll stay right here and help Papa. See? Otherwise you'll go to New York on foot, and have the pleasure of living on what the three-ball specialists will give you for your hardware. No work, no pennies, Jerry. Understand that? Now go and think it over. Papa's too busy to play with little boys to-day."

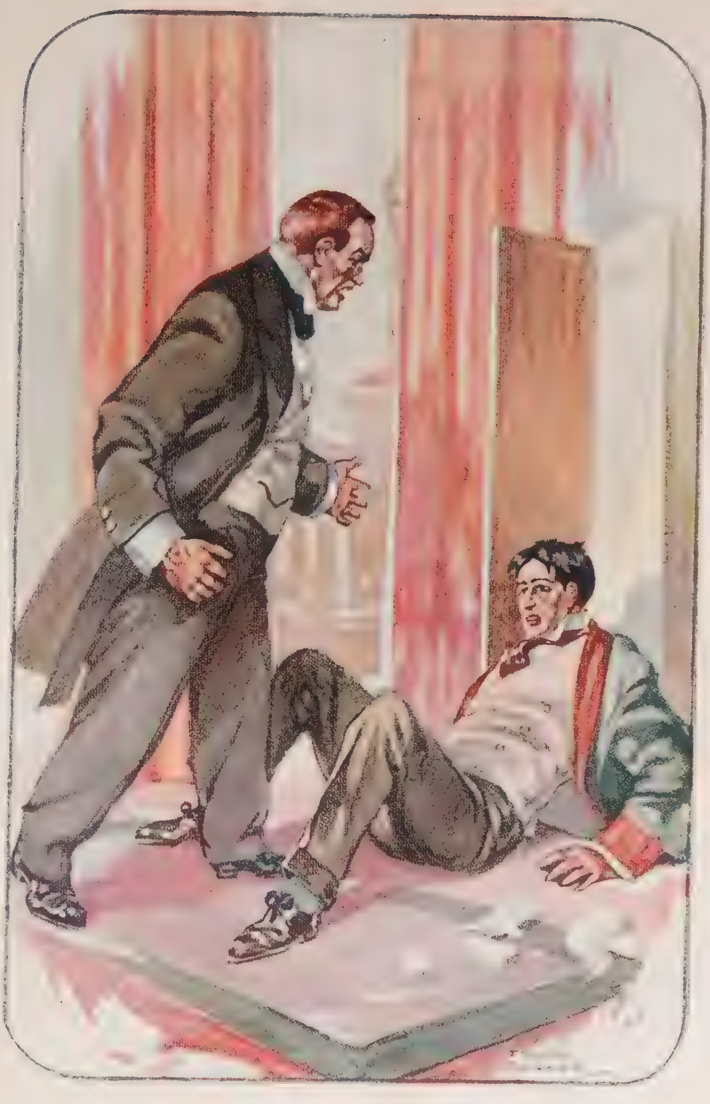
To Caleb's secret delight he saw he had at last roused a spark of spirit in the lad.

"My business in New York," retorted Gerald hotly, "is not with waiters or hotels. It is with my wife."

Caleb sat down very hard.

"Your—your—" he sputtered apoplectically.

"My wife," returned the youth, a sheepish pride in look and words. "It was that I came up here to speak to you about this morning. You were so busy yesterday when I got to town that——"



"Are you going to tell me about this thing, or have I got to shake it out of you?" Page 61.

“ Jerry, you ass! Are you crazy or only drunk? ”

“ Father,” protested Gerald with a petulance that only half hid his growing nervousness, “ I do wish you’d call me ‘ Gerald,’ and drop that wretched nickname. If——”

He got no further. Conover was upon him, his tough, knotty hands gripping the youngster’s shoulders and shaking him to and fro with a force that set Gerald’s teeth clicking.

“ Now then! ” bellowed the Railroader, mighty, masterful, terrible as he let the breathless lad slide to the floor and towered wrathful above him. “ Are you going to tell me about this thing, or have I got to shake it out of you? Speak up! ”

Gulping, panting, all the spirit momentarily buffeted out of him, Gerald Conover lay staring stupidly up at the angry man.

“ I’m—I’m married! ” he bleated. “ I—I meant to tell you when——”

“ Who to? ” demanded Caleb in an agony of self-control.

“ Miss Enid Montmorency. She——”

“ Who is she? ”

“ She is—she’s my wife. Two months ago we——”

“ Who is she? Is she in society? ”

“ Her family were very famous before the war. She——”

"Is she in good New York society?"

"She—she had to earn her own living and——"

"And what?"

"She—I met her at Rector's first. Her company——"

"Great Lord!"

The words came like a thunderclap. Caleb Conover stepped back to the wall, his florid face gray.

"*You MARRIED a chorus girl?*"

"She—her family before the war——"

Caleb had himself in hand.

"Get up!" he ordered. "You haven't money enough nor earning power enough to buy those boards you're sprawling on. Yet you saddle yourself with a wife—a wife you can't support. A woman who will down all your social hopes. And mine. You let a designing doll with a painted face dupe you into——"

"You shan't speak that way of Enid!" flared up the boy, tearfully. "She is as good and pure as——"

"As *you* are. And with a damned sight more sense. For she knows a legal way of grabbing onto a livelihood; and *you* don't. Shut up! If you try any novel-hero airs on me, you young skunk, I'll break you over my knee. Now you'll stand still and you'll listen to what I have to say."

Gerald, cowed, but snarling under his breath, obeyed.

"I won't waste breath telling you all I'd hoped for you," began Conover, "or how I tried to give you all I missed in my own boyhood. You haven't the brains to understand—or care. What I've got to say is all about money. And I never found you too stupid to listen to that. You've cut your throat. Nothing can mend that. We'll talk about the future at another time. It's the present we've got to 'tend to now. You're going to be of some use to me at last. The only use you ever will be to anyone. Your allowance, for a few months, is going on just the same as before. But you've got to earn it. And you're going to earn it by staying right here in Granite, and working like a dog for me in this campaign. If you stir out of this town, or if your—that woman comes here, or if you don't use your pull in my behalf with the sapheads you travel with at the Pompton Club—if you don't do all this, I say, till further orders—then, for now and all time, you'll earn your own way. For you'll not get another nickel out of me. I guess you know me well enough to understand I'll go by what I say. Take your choice. You've got an earning ability of about $4 a week. You've got an allowance of $48,000 a year. Now, till after election, which'll it be?"

Father and son faced each other in silence for a full minute. Then the latter's eyes fell.

"I'll stay!" he muttered.

"I thought so. Now chase! I'm busy."

Gerald slouched to the door. On the threshold he turned and shook his fist in impotent fury at the broad back turned on him.

"I'll stay!" he repeated, his voice scaling an octave and breaking in a hysterical sob, "I'll stay! But, before God, I'll find a way to pay you off for this before the campaign is over."

Caleb did not turn at the threat nor at the loud-slamming door. He was scribbling a telegram to his New York lawyer.

"*Gerald in scrape with chorus girl, Enid Montmorency*," he wrote. "*Find her and buy her off. Go as high as* $100,000."

"Father Healy says, 'The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children,'" he quoted half aloud as he finished; "but when they are visited in the shape of blithering idiocy, it seems 'most like a breach of contract."

The Railroader was not fated to enjoy even the scant privilege of solitude. He had hardly seated himself at his desk when the sacred door was once more assailed by inquisitive knuckles.

" The Boys haven't wasted much time," he thought as he growled permission to enter.

The tall, exquisitely-groomed figure of his new son-in-law, the Prince d'Antri, blocked the threshold. With him was Blanche.

" Do we intrude? " asked d'Antri, blandly, as he ushered his wife through the doorway and placed a chair for her. Caleb watched him without reply. The multifarious branches of social usage always affected him with contemptuous hopelessness. He saw no sense in them; but neither, as he confessed disgustedly to himself, could he, even if he chose, possibly acquire them.

" We don't intrude, I hope," repeated the prince, closing the door behind him, and sitting down near the littered centre table.

" Keep on hoping! " vouchsafed Conover gruffly. " What am I to do for you? "

He could never grow accustomed to this foreign son-in-law whom he had known but two days. Obedient, for once, to his wife, and to his daughter's written instructions, he had yielded to the marriage, had consented to its performance at the American Embassy at Paris rather than at the white marble Pompton Avenue " Mausoleum," and had readily allowed himself to be convinced that the union meant a social stride for the entire family such as could never otherwise have been attained.

His wife and daughter had returned from Europe just before the reception (whose details had, by his own command, been left wholly to Caleb), bringing with them the happy bridegroom. Caleb had never before seen a prince. In his youth, fairy tales had not been his portion; so he had not even the average child's conception of a mediæval Being in gold-spangled doublet and hose, to guide him. Hence his ideas had been more than shadowy. What he had seen was a very tall, very slender, very handsome personage, whose costumes and manner a keener judge of fashion would have decided were on a par with the princely command of English: perfect, but a trifle too carefully accentuated to appeal to Yankee tastes.

Beyond the most casual intercourse and table talk there had been hitherto no scope for closer acquaintanceship between the two men. The reception had taken up everyone's time and thoughts. Caleb had, however, studied the prince from afar, and had sought to apply to him some of the numberless classifications in which he was so unerringly wont to place his fellow-men. But none of the ready-made moulds seemed to fit the newcomer.

"What can I do for you?" repeated Conover, looking at his watch. "In a few minutes I'm expecting some——"

"We shall not detain you long. We have come to speak to you on a—a rather delicate theme."

"Delicate?" muttered Caleb, glancing up from the politely embarrassed prince to his daughter. "Well, speak it out, then. The best treatment for delicate things is a little healthy exposure. What is it?"

"I ventured to interrupt your labors," said d'Antri, his face reflecting a gentle look of pain at his host's brusqueness, "to speak to you in reference to your daughter's *dot*."

"Her which?" queried Caleb, looking at the bride as though in search of symptoms of some violent, unsuspected malady.

"Amadeo means my dowry," explained Blanche, with some impatience. "It is the custom, you know, on the Continent."

"Not on any part of the Continent *I* ever struck. And I've been pretty much all over it from 'Frisco to Quebec. It's a new one on me."

"In Europe," said Blanche, tapping her foot, and gazing apologetically at her handsome husband, "it is customary—as I thought everybody knew—for girls to bring their husbands a marriage portion. How much are you going to settle on me?"

"How much what? Money? You've always had your $25,000 a year allowance, and I've never kicked when you overdrew it. But now you're married, I suppose your husband——"

"But, Mr. Conover," broke in the prince, with more eagerness than Caleb had ever before seen on his placid exterior, "I think you fail to understand. I—we——"

"What are you driving at?" snapped Conover. "Do you mean you can't support your wife?"

"Papa!" cried Blanche, in distress, "for once in your life try not to be coarse. It isn't a question of support. It is the custom——"

"For a father to pay a man to marry his girl? I can't see it myself, though now you speak about it, I seem to have read or heard something of the sort. Well, if it's a custom, I suppose it goes. How much?"

The prince shivered, very gently, very daintily.

"If it affects you that way," growled Caleb, "I wouldn't 'a' brought up the subject if I was you. Say, Blanche, if you're too timid to make a suggestion, how'll this strike you? I'll double your present allowance—$50,000 a year, eh?"

"Impossible!" gasped d'Antri.

"Not on your life!" retorted Caleb. "I could double that and never feel it. Don't you worry about me not being able——"

"But I cannot consent to——"

"Who's asked you to? It's to be *her* cash, ain't it? Not yours. I don't think you come on in this scene at all, Prince. It seems to be up to me and Blanche. And——"

"Oh, you'll *never* understand!" cried Blanche in despair. "For the daughter of a man of your means, and the social position I am to occupy as Princess d'Antri, my *dot* should be at least——"

"Hold on!" interposed Caleb. "I think I begin to see. I——"

"You *don't* see," contradicted his daughter, pettishly; "I'll have to explain. It——"

"No, you won't. If I couldn't understand things without waiting to have 'em explained, I'd still be braking at $50 a month. As I take it, this prince party meets you in Yurrup, hears your father is *the* Caleb Conover—an old fool of an American with a pretty daughter to place on the nobility market—and you make your bid. You marry him and he's so sure of his ground he don't even hold out for an ante-wedding bonus. He chases over here with you, and when he don't find the dowry, or whatever else you call it, waiting for him at the dock, he makes bold to ring the cash register."

The prince was on his feet.

"I cannot consent, sir, to listen to such——"

"Oh, yes, you can. I've heard of your sort. But I somehow thought they were all counts. I didn't know exactly how a prince stood; but I supposed the job carried an income with it. It seems you're just in the count class, after all. The kind of man that loafs about Yurrup living on the name of some ancestor who got his title by acting as hired man to his king or emperor or whoever ruled his two-for-a-quarter country. The sort of man that does nothing for a living and don't even do that well enough to keep him in pocket money. Then some lookout makes the high sign, 'Heiress in sight!' and——"

Blanche burst into tears. Her husband threw his arm about her shoulders in assiduous, theatrical fashion, while Caleb sat gnawing his unlighted cigar and grimly eyeing the couple.

"There, there, *carissima mia!*" soothed d'Antri, "your father knows no better. In this barbarous country of his there are no leisure classes. I——"

"You bet there are!" snorted Caleb. "Only, here we call 'em tramps. And we give 'em thirty days instead of our daughters. Here, stop that damned snivelling, Blanche! You know how I hate it. I'm stung all right, and it's too late to squeal. The only time there's any use in crying over spilt milk is when there's a soft-hearted milkman cruising around within hearing distance. And from where I sit, I don't see any such rushing to my help. You'll get your '*dot*' all right. Just as you knew you would before you put up that whimper. We'll fix up the details when I've got more time on my hands.

"Only, I want you and me and this prince-feller of yours to understand each other, *clear*. I'm letting myself be bled for a certain sum, because I've crowed so loud about your being a princess that I can't back down now without raising a laugh, and without spoiling all I've planned to get by this marriage. Besides, I'm going to run for governor, and I don't want any scandal or 'dramatic separation for lack of cash' coming from my own family. I'm caught fair, and I'll pay. But I want us three to understand that it's straight blackmail, and that I pay it just as I'd pay to have any other dirty story hushed up. That'll be all to-day. If you want some reading matter, Prince, here's a paper with a list of the liners that sail for Yurrup next week. Nothing personal intended, you know. Good-by."

"But, papa—" began Blanche, who, like d'Antri, had listened to this exordium with far less natural resentment than might have been looked for.

"That'll be all, I said," repeated Conover. "You win your point. Clear out! I'm busy."

The princess knew Caleb too well to press the victory further. She tearfully left the room, d'Antri following in her wake. At the door the latter paused, his long white fingers toying with his silky beard.

"Sir," he said, "you may be assured that I shall never forget your generosity, even though it is couched in such unusual language. You shall never regret it. I understand you have a wish to adorn the best society and——"

"No," grunted Conover, "not the Best, only the Highest. And it's no concern of yours, either way. Good-by!"

As the titled couple withdrew, Anice Lanier came in.

"Mr. Shevlin, Mr. Bourke and most of the others you sent for have come," she reported. "Shall I send them up?"

"Yes," said Conover dully, "send 'em

along. It'll be good to talk to real human beings again. Say, Miss Lanier"—as the girl started to obey his order—"did you ever write out that measly interview of mine for the *Star*, endorsing those new views of Roosevelt's on race-suicide, and saying something about a childless home being a curse to——"

"Yes. I was just going to mail it. Shall——?"

"Well, don't! Tear it up. There's no sense in a man being funny at his own expense."

CHAPTER IV

IN TWO CAMPS

In the headquarters of the Civic League sat Clive Standish. With him were the committee chosen to conduct his campaign. Karl Ansel, a lean, hard-headed New England giant, their chairman, and incidentally, campaign manager, was going laboriously over a list of counties, towns and villages, corroborating certain notes he made from time to time, by referring to a big colored map of the Mountain State.

"I've checked off the places that are directly under the thumb of the C. G. & X.," Ansel was explaining as the rest of the group leaned over to watch the course of his pencil along the map. "I'm afraid they are as hopelessly in Conover's grip as Granite itself. It's in the rural districts, and in the towns that aren't dependent on the main line, that we must find our strength. It's an uphill fight at best, with——"

"With a million-and-a-half people who are paying enormous taxes for which they receive scant value, who have thrust on them a legislature and other officials they are forced to elect at the Boss's order!" finished Standish. "Surely, it's an uphill fight that's well worth while, if we can wake men to a sense of their own slavery and the frauds they are forced to connive at. And that's what we're going to do."

The more experienced, if less enthusiastic, Ansel scratched his chin doubtfully.

"The people, as a mass, are slow to wake," he observed. "Oftener they just open one eye and growl at being bothered, and then roll over and go happily to sleep again while the Boss goes through their pockets. Don't start this campaign too optimistically, Mr. Standish. And don't get the idea the people are begging to be waked. If you wake them you've got to do it against their will. Not with any help of theirs. Maybe you can. Maybe you can't. As you say, it's perhaps worth a try. Even if——"

"But they've been waked before," insisted Standish. "And when they do awaken, there are no half-measures about it. Look how Jerome, on an independent fight, won out against the Machine in 1905. Why should the Mountain State——"

"The people are sleepy by nature," laughed Ansel. "They wake up with a roar, chase the Boss out of their house, smash the Machine and then go back to bed again with the idea they're heroes. As soon as their eyes are shut, back strolls the Boss, mends his Machine and reopens business at the old stand. And that's what you have to look forward to. But we've been all over this sort of thing before. I'll have your 'speech-route' made out in an hour, and start a man over it this afternoon to arrange about the halls and the 'papering' and the press work. Speaking of press work, I had your candidature telegraphed to New York to the Associated Press early this morning. There'll be a perfect cloud of reporters up here before night. We must arrange to see them before the Conover crowd can get hold of them. Sympathy from out-of-State papers won't do us any harm. The country at large has a pretty fair idea of the way Conover runs the Mountain State. And the country likes to watch a good fight against long odds. There's lots of sympathy for the under dog—as long as the sympathizer has no money on the upper one."

"How about the sketch of the situation that you were having Craig write out, telling about the stolen franchises, the arbitrary tax-rate, the machine-made candidates, the railroad rule and all that? It ought to prove a good campaign document if he handles the subject well."

" Oh, he's handled it all right. I've read the rough draft. Takes Conover from the very start. Tells of his boyhood in the yards of the C. G. & X., and how he bullied and schemed until he got into the management's offices, the string of saloons he ran along the route and the drink-checks he made the men on his section cash in for liquor at his saloons, and all that. Then his career as Alderman, when he found out beforehand where the new reservoir lands and City Hall site were to be, and his buying them up, on mortgage, and clearing his first big pile. And that deal he worked in ' bearing ' the C. G. & X. stock to $1.10, and scaring everyone out and scooping the pot; that's brought in, too. And he's got the story of Conover's gradually working the railroad against the State and the State against the road, till he had a throat grip on both, and——"

" Wait a moment! " interrupted Standish. " Is all the sketch made up of that sort of thing? "

" Most of it. Good, red-hot——"

" It must be done all over, then. We are not digging up Conover's personal past, but his influence on the State and on the Democratic Party. I'm not swinging the muckrake or flinging dirt at my opponent. That sort of vituperation——"

"But it's hot stuff, I tell you, that sort of literature! It helps a lot. You can't hope to win if you wear kid gloves in a game like this."

"What's the use of arguing?" said Standish pleasantly. "If the League was rash enough to choose me to represent it, then the League must put up with my peculiarities. And I don't intend to rise to the Capitol on any mud piles. If you can show me how Conover's early frauds and his general crookedness affect the issues of the campaign, then I'll give you leave to publish his whole biography. But till then let's run clean, shan't we?"

"'*Clean?*'" echoed Ansel aghast. "I've been in this business a matter of twenty-five years, and I never yet heard of a victory won by drawing-room methods. But have your own way. I suppose you know, though, that they'll rake up every lie and slur against you they can get their hands on?"

"I suppose so. But *that* won't affect the general issue either. You don't seem to realize, Ansel, that this isn't the ordinary routine campaign. It's an effort to throw off Boss rule and to free a State. Politics and personalities don't enter into it at all. I'd as soon have run on the Republican as the Democratic ticket if it weren't that the Republican Party in this State is virtually dead. The Democratic nominee for governor in the Mountain State is practically the governor-elect. That is why I——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Standish," said a clerk, entering from the outer office, "Mr. Conover would like a word with you."

The committee stared at one another, unbelieving.

"H'm!" remarked Ansel, breaking the silence of surprise, "I guess the campaign's on in earnest, all right. Shall you see him?"

"Yes. Show him in, please, Gardner."

"He says, sir, he wants to speak with you alone," added the clerk.

"Tell him the League's committee are in session, and that he must say whatever he has to say to me in their presence."

The clerk retired and reappeared a few moments later, ushering in—Gerald Conover.

A grunt of disappointment from Ansel was the first sound that greeted the long youth as he paused irresolute just inside the committee-room door.

"Good-morning, Gerald," said Standish, rising to greet the unexpected visitor; "we thought it was your father who——"

"No. And he didn't send me here, either," blurted out Gerald. His pasty face was still twitching, and his usually immaculate collar awry from the recent paternal interview.

"I came here on my own account," he went on, with the peevish wrath of a child. "I came here to tell you I swing over a hundred votes. Maybe a hundred more. My father says so himself. And I've come to join your League."

A gasp of amazement ran around the table. Then, with a crow of delight, Ansel sprang up.

"Great!" he shouted. "His *son!* It's good for more votes than you know, Standish! Why, man, it's a bonanza! When even a man's own son can't——"

Standish cut him short.

"Are you drunk, Gerald?" he asked.

"No, I'm not!" vociferated the lad. "I'm dead cold sober, and I'm doing this with my eyes open. I want to join your League, and I'll work like a dog for your election."

"But why? You and I have never been especially good friends. You've never shown any interest in politics or ref——"

"Well, I will now, you bet! I'll make the old man wish he'd packed me off to New York by the first train. He'll sweat for the way he treated me before he's done. I suppose I've got to work secretly for you, so he won't suspect. But I'll do none the less work for that; and I can keep you posted on the other side's moves, too. If I'm to be tied to this damned one-horse town by Father's orders till after election, I'll make him sorry he ever——"

"Good for you!" cried Ansel. "You've got the spirit of a man, after all. Here's a bunch of our membership blanks. Fill this one out, and give the rest to your club friends. We—why, Standish!" he broke off, furious and dumbfounded; for Clive had calmly stepped between the two, taken the membership blank from Gerald's shaky hand and torn it across.

"We don't care for members of your sort, Gerald," he said, with a cold contempt that was worse than a kick. "This League was formed to help our City and State, not to gratify private grudges; for white men, not for curs who want to betray their own flesh and blood. Get out of here!"

"Standish!" protested the horrified Ansel, "you're crazy! You're throwing away our best chance. You are——"

"If this apology for a human being is 'our best chance,' I'll throw him out bodily, unless he goes at once," retorted Clive, advancing on the cowering and utterly astonished boy.

" Why! " sputtered Gerald, as he backed doorward, before the menacing approach of the Leaguer, " I thought you'd want me—I— Oh, I'll go, then, if you've no more sense than that! But I'll find a way of downing the old man in spite of you! Maybe you'll be glad enough to get my help when the time comes! I——"

His heels hit against the threshold in his retrograde march. Still declaiming, he stepped over the sill into the outer office, and Clive Standish slammed the door upon him, breaking off his threats in the middle of their fretful outpouring.

" There," said Clive, returning to the gaping, frowning committeemen, " that's off our hands. Now let's get down to business."

" Mr. Standish," remarked Ansel, after a moment's battle with words he found hard to check, " you're the most Quixotic, impractical idealist that ever got hold of the foolish idea he had a ghost of a chance for success in politics. And," he added, after a pause, " I'm blest if I don't think I'd rather lose with a leader like you than win with any other man in the Mountain State."

Meanwhile, at the head of the great study table in his Pompton Avenue " Mausoleum " sat Caleb Conover, Railroader. And about him, on either side of the board, like feudal retainers of old, were grouped the pick of his lieutenants and henchmen. A rare coterie they were, these Knights of Graft. Separated by ten thousand varying interests, social strata and aspirations, they were as one on the main issue—their blind adherence to the Boss and to the lightest of his orders.

This impelling force was difficult of defining. Love, fear, trust, desire for spoils? Perhaps a little of all four; perhaps much; perhaps an indefinable something apart from these. For the power that draws and holds men to a political leader who possesses neither eloquence, charm nor the qualities of popularity has never been—can never be—clearly defined. Not one great Boss in ten can boast these qualities.

Yet, whatever the reason of Caleb Conover's dominance, none could for a moment doubt its presence. So ever-present was it that it had long since choked down all opposition from within his own ranks. Once, years before—as the story is still related—when he had first claimed, fought for and won his party preëminence, certain district leaders, eight in all, had plotted his downfall, and had privately selected one of their number to fill his shoes. News of the closed-door meeting which was to ratify this deposition was brought to Caleb by faithful Shevlin. The Railroader, without a word, had started for the back room of the saloon where the conference was in progress. Stalking in on the conspirators, he had gained the centre of their circle before they were well aware of his presence. Hat on head, cigar in mouth, he had swept the ring of faces with his light, steely eyes, noting each man there in one instant-brief glance as he did so. Then, twisting the cigar into one corner of his mouth, he had brought down his fist on the table and demanded:

" How many of you people are with ME? "

Like a pack of eager schoolboys the entire eight were upon their feet, clamoring their fealty. Then, without another word or look, the Master had stamped out of the room; leaving the erstwhile malcontents, as one of them afterward expressed it:

" Standin' there like a bunch of boiled sheepsheads without a thought but to shake hands with ourselves for havin' such a grand Boss as Caleb Conover."

At the Boss's right in to-day's conclave sat Billy Shevlin, most trusted and adoring of all his followers. At his left was Guy Bourke, Alderman and the Boss's jackal. Next to Billy was Bonham, Mayor of Granite, and next Giacomo Baltazzi, who held the whole

Italian section force of the C. G. & X. and the Sicilian quarter of Granite in the hollow of his unwashed hand. Beyond was Nicholas Caine, proprietor of the *Star*, and to his right Beiser, the Democratic State Chairman. Between a second newspaper editor and the President of the Board of Aldermen lounged Kerrigan, the Ghetto saloon-keeper. A sprinkling of railroad men, heelers and district leaders made up the remainder. Conover was speaking:

" And that's the layout," said he. " And that's why I'm not content for this to be just a plain ' win.' Two years ago I thought Shearn would be our best man for governor. So I gave the word, and Shearn got in with a decent majority. But it's got to be a landslide this time, and not a trick's to be overlooked in the whole hand. Nick, you know the line of editorial policy to start in to-morrow's *Star*. And be on the lookout for the first break in any of the League's speeches. It's easier to think of a fool thing than not to say it, and those Reform jays are always putting their feet in their mouths when they try to preach politics. And, knowing nothing about the game, they're sure to talk a heap. They never seem to realize that the man who really practices politics hasn't time to preach it."

" I understand," answered Caine. " Print, as usual, a ' spread ' on the windy, blundering speeches, and forget to report the others. Same as when——"

" Sure. And pass the ' press-gag ' sign up-State, too. Standish is certain to make a tour. Beiser," turning to the portly State Chairman, " I want the county caucuses two weeks from Saturday. I've an idea we can work the same old ' snap ' move in more'n half of them. Pass it on to the county chairman to treble last year's floaters, and to work the ' back door ' the way we did in Bowden County in '97. They understand their business pretty well, most of 'em. And I'll have Shevlin and Bourke jack up those that don't, and learn 'em their little lines. Two weeks from Saturday, then. That's understood? It'll give us all the time we need, if we hustle. Never mind the other State or city candidates or Congressmen. Those jobs'll take care of themselves. If the wrong men get into the Assembly or Congress, they'll get licked into shape quick enough. We're all right there. I want the whole shove to be made on the Governorship this year. Pass it on! Baltazzi, I hear those dagoes of yours are grouching again. What's——"

" They say they don't get nothin'. They

say all the good jobs goes to the Irish or Dutch or even Americans, and——"

"Promise 'em something, then."

"I have. But——"

"Then promise 'em something more. Don't be stingy. If that don't satisfy 'em, give me the tip, and I'll have a ten per cent. drop ordered on the foreign section gangs' pay, and make Chief Geoghegan pass the word to his cops to make things bad for the pushcart men and organ grinders, and close up the dago saloons an hour early. That'll bring 'em in a-running. How 'bout litterchoor, Abbott?"

"I'll start the staff to work on songs to-night," said a long-haired little man, "and get out a bunch of 'Friend of the Plain People' tracts and——"

"Won't do! 'Man-of-Experience-and-Benefactor-of-the-State or Ignorant-Meddling-Boy-Reformer. Which-Will-You-Vote-For?' That's the racket this time. Guy the whole League crowd. 'Silk Stockings *vs.* Laboring Man.' That's the idea. Get the cartoonists at work on pictures like Standish making the police sprinkle the streets with Florida water while thugs break into houses, and that sort of thing. 'What-We-May-Expect-from-Civic-League-Rule.' Understand? Say, Caine, detail one or two of your men, of course, to look up Standish's past performances in private life, too. Anything about booze or the cards or any sort of scrape will work up fine just now. The gag's old, but about a reformer it always makes a hit. Even a bit of a stretch goes. I'll stand a libel suit or two if it comes to a showdown."

"How about the out-of-town papers?" queried Caine. "Our regular chain are all right. But the rest——"

"The C. G. & X. owns the Mountain State, don't it? And it controls ninety per cent. of the mileage of the other roads that run through the State. And wherever there's towns big enough for a paper there's a railroad somewhere near. And wherever there's an editor he wants his passes, don't he? And a rebate on his freight? Well—don't you lose sleep over the 'press-gag.'"

"How about floaters?" asked Bourke. "Same rule and same price?"

"Yes. Subject to change if we're pressed. Aldermen all right, I s'pose?"

"Haven't had a chance to sound 'em since you declared yourself," said the president of that body, "but all except Fowler and Brayle are your own crowd and——"

"Tell Fowler the C. G. & X. will give his firm a tip on the price for the next 'sealed-bid' contract for railroad ties. Give Brayle a hint about that indictment against his brother. It was pigeonholed, but if I tried real hard, I might induce the District Attorney to look for it. I tell you," went on Conover, raising his voice for the first time, and glaring about the table, "every mother's son, from engine-oiler to Congressman, has got to get down to the job and hustle as he never did before. And I've got the means of finding out who hustles and who shirks. And I've got the means of paying both kinds. And I guess there isn't anyone that doubts I can do it. Pass that on, too. Caleb Conover for Governor, and to hell with reform!"

CHAPTER V

A MEETING, AN INTERRUPTION AND A LETTER

THE campaign was on in sober earnest. Conover, who kept as well posted on his foe's movements as though the League itself sent him hourly reports, grew vaguely annoyed as, from day to day, he learned the headway Standish was making in Granite. The better classes, almost to a man, flocked to Clive's standard. By a series of fiery speeches he succeeded in rousing a certain hitherto dormant enthusiasm among the business men of the town. They found to their surprise that he was neither a visionary nor a mere agitator; that he based his plans not on some Utopian Altruria of high-souled commonweal, but on a practical basis of clean government.

He pointed out to them how utterly the Machine ran the Mountain State; how the railroads and the vested interests of the party clique sent their own representatives to the Legislature, and then made them grant fraudulent franchise after fraudulent franchise to the men who sent them there. How the taxes were raised and so distributed that the brunt fell upon the people who least profited by the State expenditures and by the legalized wholesale robberies. How, in fact, the populace of Granite and of the whole Mountain State were being ridden at will by a handful of unscrupulous men.

That Caleb Conover was the head and front of the clique referred to everyone was well aware, yet Standish studiously avoided all mention of his name, all personal vituperation. Whereat Caleb Conover wondered mightily. Stenographic reports of Clive's speeches and of the increasingly large and enthusiastic meetings he addressed were carefully conned by the Railroader. And the tolerant grin with which he read the first of these reports changed gradually to a scowl as time went on.

He had made no effort to suppress or in any way to molest these early meetings. He wanted to try out his young opponent's strength, gauge his following and his methods. But when, to his growing astonishment, he found Clive was actually winning a respectful, ever larger, hearing in his home town, he decided it was high time to call a halt. Accordingly he summoned Billy Shevlin.

"What's doing?" he asked curtly, as he

received his henchmen in the Mausoleum study.

" To-night's the big rally at Snyder's Opera House, you know," replied Billy. " Standish's booked to make his star speech before he starts on his State tour. He's got a team of Good Gov'ment geezers from Boston to do a spiel, and he's callin' this the biggest scream of the campaign so far. Say, that young feller's makin' an awful lot of noise, Boss. When are you goin' to give us the office to put the combination on his mouth? On the level, he ain't doin' you no good. Them speeches of his means votes. The Silk-Socks is with him already, and he's winner with the business bunch in fam'ly groups."

" Look here," said Caleb, pointing out of the study's north window, which commanded a view of exclusive Pompton Avenue and its almost equally fashionable cross streets, " how would you figure up the population of that district? "

" The Silk-Sockers? You know's well as me. Thirty-eight hundred in round numbers."

" And over there? " pointing east.

" Th' business districk? An easy 12,000."

" Say 16,000 in both. S'pose they are all for the young Standish. Now look here."

He crossed the long room and ran up the

shade of one of the south windows. The great marble house stood on the edge of a hill-crest, overlooking a distant vista of mean, winding streets, dirty, interminable rows of tenements, factories and small shops. Through the centre, like a huge snake, the tracks of the C. G. & X. wound their way, and over all a smeared pall of reek and coal smoke brooded like some vast bird of prey. Coal yards, docks, freight houses, elevators, shanties—and once more that interminable sea of dingy, squalid domiciles.

"What's the population down there, Billy?"

"Hundred'n ten thousand, six hundred an'—" began Shevlin glibly. "An' every soul of them solid for you, Boss. Sixteen thousand to hundred-'n'-ten-thous——"

"That's right. So as long as the youngster's content to speak his little pieces here in Granite, I've stood by and let him talk. It would be time enough to put in a spoke when he started across country. But this blowout to-night is different. The stories of it will get in the Boston and Philadelphia and New York papers. So——"

"Well?"

"So there won't be any meeting?"

"If you say so, it goes Will I give the boys the office to rough-house the joint?"

"And have every out-of-State paper screeching about ring rule and rowdyism? Billy, you must have been born more ignorant than most. You never could have picked up all you don't know, in the little time you've lived."

Shevlin looked duly abashed and awaited further orders.

"I hear the gas main that serves Snyder's Opera House isn't in very good order," resumed the Boss. "I shouldn't wonder if all the lights went out just as the meeting opens to-night. That'll mean a lot of confusion. And my friend, Chief Geoghegan, being a careful man, will disperse the crowd to prevent a riot, and to keep pickpockets from molesting those pure patriots. I want you to see Geoghegan and the gas company about it, right away. But look here, there mustn't be any rough-house or disorder. Tell the boys to keep away. I'll have work enough for them to do when Standish takes the road."

Billy Shevlin, a great light of joy in his little beady eyes, departed on his mission, while Caleb, summoning Anice Lanier, set about his daily task of dictation. His always large mail was still more voluminous during the past week or so, and he had been forced to double his staff of stenographers. He and his secretary toiled steadily for three hours to-day, then laid aside the remaining work until later on.

"How'll you like being secretary to the Governor, Miss Lanier?" asked Caleb, as he lighted his cigar and stretched out his thick legs under the table.

"Fully as much as you'll like being Governor, I fancy," she answered.

"I guess you won't have to be very much wedded to the job at that," sighed Conover. "Do you know, I'd give a year's income if I'd never made that measly speech. But now that I'm in for it, I'm going to make the fight of my life. Everybody in the Mountain State will sure know there's been a big scrap, and when it's over, our young friend, Standish, is going to be just a sweet, sad memory."

"I hear he is making some strong speeches."

"And I hear you went to hear a couple of them," retorted Caleb, grinning.

"Do you mean," she cried indignantly, "that you've actually been spying on me? You have dared to——?"

"Now, *don't* get woozey, Miss Lanier. What on earth would I spy on *you* for? Your time, outside work hours, is your own. And besides, I've got all sorts of proof that you're always loyal to my interests."

"Then how——"

"How'd I find it out? While I don't keep tabs on *you*, I do keep tabs on Nephew-in-law Standish, and on his meetings and what sort of people go there. And a couple of times my men happened to mention that they saw my pretty secretary in the audience. There, now, don't get red. What harm is there in being found out? Only it kind of amused me that you never spoke about it here."

"Why should I? I——".

"No reason at all. A person's got a right to lock up what's in their minds as well as what's in their pockets. I always have a lot of respect for folks who keep their mouths shut. If you keep your mouth shut about your own affairs, you'll keep it shut about mine. That's why I have a kind of sneaking respect for liars, too. Folks who guard what's in their brains by making a false trail with their mouths. The public's got no more right to the contents of a man's brain than it has to the contents of his safe. And the man who ain't ashamed to lock his safe needn't be ashamed to tell a lie."

"Is that your own philosophy? It's a dangerous one."

"Oh, I'm not speaking of the man who lies for the fun of it. Telling a lie when you don't need to is tempting Providence."

The girl laughed; so simple and so totally in earnest was he in expounding his pet theory. It was only to her that the Railroader was in the habit of talking on abstruse themes. Despite her habitual reserve, he read an underlying interest in his odd ideas and experiences, and was accordingly lavish in relating them. She served, unconsciously to both, as an escape valve for the man's habitual dominating self-restraint.

"So you agree with Talleyrand," she suggested, "that words are given us to hide our thoughts?"

"Talleyrand?" he asked, puzzled. "Oh, one of those book characters you admire so much, I s'pose. Yes, he was all right in that proposition. But a lot of times the truth will hide a man's thoughts even better. It was by telling the truth I got out of the worst hole I ever was in. Ever tell you the mix-up I had with the Mountain State Coal Company?"

"Coal Company? I didn't know there was any coal in the Mountain State."

"No more there is. Only I didn't know it then. A chap came along and interested me in the deal. He said he'd struck a rich coal vein up in Jericho County. Showed me specimens. Got 'em somewhere in Pennsylvania, I s'pose. And got me to float a company. Well, the stuff they took out of the measly shaft was a sort of porous black slate or shale or something, and it wouldn't burn if you put it in a white-hot blast furnace. One look showed me that. And there I was with a company capitalized at $300,000—half of it my own money—and suckers subscribing for the stock and all that, and a gang of a couple of hundred Ginneys and Svensks at work in the pit. It wasn't that I minded the cash loss so much as I minded being played for a jay, and the black eye it would give any companies I might float in the future.

"I'll tell you, I was pretty sore. I was younger in those days, you see. I ran up to Jericho to look over the wreck. Next day was pay day for the hands, and I hadn't enough cash with me for half of 'em. I sat in my hotel that night thinking of the row and smashup there'd be next morning, and just wishing I had a third foot to kick myself with. The lamp got low, and I called for the landlord to fill it. Some of the kerosene leaked out while he was doing it and spilled over a handful of the ore that was lying on the table. That porous stuff soaked it up like a sponge. The mess made me sick, and I picked up the samples of near-coal and slammed 'em into the fireplace. They blazed like a Sheeney clothing store."

"I thought you said it wouldn't burn."

"The pieces were soaked in kerosene, and of course they burned, just as a lamp would if you threw it in the fire. But it gave me the tip I wanted. I bolted out of that hotel and hunted up a couple of my own crowd. We had the busiest night on record. No use bothering you with details. A shed, three barrels of kerosene and a half a ton of ore. Then early next morning I wandered into the hotel office and did a despairful scream. I'd seen to it that the editor of the local paper was there, and I knew a bunch of the 'big guns' of the place always congregated in the office for an after-breakfast gossip. Well, I groaned pretty loud and hectic about the way I'd been stuck on the ore.

"'What's the matter with it?' asked one of my two pals. 'Won't the stuff burn?'

"'Burn!' I yells. 'It won't do a thing *but* burn. It burns so hot, it'll ruin any grate it's put in. Why, heat like that is worse than none at all. It'll burn out the best grate or furnace in a week. Nobody'll be fool enough to buy such stuff. The company's smashed!'

"They all stared at me as if I were looney. Then I made out I was mad clear through.

"'Don't believe me, eh?' says I. 'Then look at this.'

"I throws a pocketful of the ore into the grate, and it blazes up like mad. The whole office was torrid hot in five minutes. But the crowd was a blamed sight hotter. They went plumb wild over the new, wonderful fuel I'd discovered, and tried to explain to me that it had the heating power of ten times its weight of coal. But all the time I just shook my head, and kept on whining that no one'd buy it because it would burn out furnaces too quick.

"Well, the upshot of it was that the news travelled like a streak of lightning. By the time I got over to the shaft, the gangs were all on, and their padrones raked up a clause in the contract that permitted 'em to take their pay in stock, at par, if they chose to, instead of cash. Just a piece of technical red tape they used to stick in mining contracts. Those padrones fairly squealed for stock, and near mobbed me when I implored 'em to accept money instead. So I compromised by issuing 'em orders for stock at ten above. But before I'd do even that, I told 'em over and over that they were making fools of themselves and the stock and ore were worthless. They laughed at me, and thought I was trying to grab all the stock for myself. So I made 'em sign a paper saying that they took it at their own request and risk, and against my will and advice; and I gave 'em their stock orders and came back to town with my pay satchel still full.

"By the time I struck the hotel the place was jammed. Folks had flocked from all over to see the wonderful fuel and watch it burn. Rich farmers, capitalists from Granite and a lot more. The stock had been at 28¼. Inside of two days it was at 129, and still booming. Then I sold. But as president of the company I refused to let a single share be distributed without the buyer signing a blank that he took it at his own risk, and that I had told him the ore was worthless. And I kept on shouting that it was worthless, and that the public was robbing itself by buying such stuff. What was the result? The more I told the truth, the harder the suckers bit. Widows and ministers and such-like easy marks most of all, I hear. I got out of the company in disgust, and announced I'd have no dealings with such an iniquitous, swindling scheme. Folks thought I'd gone clean silly, and they bought and bought and bought, and then——"

"And then?" as Conover lighted a fresh cigar.

"Oh, then they woke up and screamed louder than ever."

"What was done about it? Was there no redress?"

"'Redress' nothing! What redress could there be for a pack of get-rich-quick guys who had insisted on buying my stock after I'd told them just how worthless it was? Didn't I have their own signed statements that I——"

" And you call that transaction an instance of truth-telling? "

" Oh, well, the *real* truth's too precious to squander foolishly where it won't be appreciated. It's like whiskey: got to be weakened to the popular taste. And speaking of liars, have you kept your eye much on Jerry lately? "

" No, why? "

" That young ass has got something on the thing he calls his mind, and I've a good working notion the ' Something ' is a scheme to get even with me. I just judge that from what I know of him. He gets his morning letter from that chorus missus of his, and then he sits and rolls his eyes at me for half an hour. He's framing up something all right, all right. What it is, I don't know. That's the advantage a fool has over a wise man! You can dope out some line of action on a man of brains, but the Almighty himself don't know what a fool'll do next. So I'm kind of riding herd on Jerry from afar."

" Perhaps if you tried a new tack—took him into your confidence——"

" There wouldn't be any confidence left.

No man's got enough for two. Sometimes I'm shy on even the little I once had."

"The campaign?"

"The campaign? That ain't a question of confidence any more than knowing the sun will rise and Missouri will go Democratic. I was thinking of the confidence I had of winning the Pompton Avenue crowd by that measly reception."

"You haven't succeeded?"

"Not so's you'd notice it. A few of the people who are so tangled up in my deals that they are scared not to be civil, nod sort of sheepish at me when I meet 'em. The rest get near-sighted as soon as I come round the corner. As for calling on us or inviting me to any of their houses, why you'd think I was the Voice of Conscience by the way they side-step me."

"But the season hasn't really opened. In most cities, people aren't even back from the seaside or mountains yet. Perhaps, later on——"

"Later on the present performance will be encored by popular request. Say, Miss Lanier, I was half jagged that night. But I can remember telling you that I was happier just then than I'd ever been before. I was in society at last. My boy was a member of the smart set in New York. My girl was a princess. I was going to be Governor."

"Yes?"

"Well, look at me now. Jerry's made a lifelong mess of his future. Blanche is on the way to Yurrup with a bargain-counter prince that I'd hate to compliment by calling deuce-high. My deebut into society was like the feller in the song, who 'Walked Right in and Turned Around and Walked Right out Again.' The Governorship's the only thing left; and I'm getting so I'm putting into that all the hopes I squandered on the rest. And when I've nailed it, I've a half mind to try for President. That'd carry me clear through society, and on out on the other side."

Anice listened to him with a sort of wonderment, which always possessed her when he spoke of his social aspirations. That a man of his indomitable strength and largeness of nature should harp so eternally and yearn so strenuously in that one petty strain, never ceased to amaze her.

"The feet of clay on the image of iron," she told herself as she dismissed the thought.

"By the way," asked Conover, as she rose to leave the room, "were you thinking of going to the Standish meeting to-night?"

"Yes," she answered, meeting his quizzical gaze fearlessly, "if you can spare me."

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I'm afraid I can't. I've about a ream of campaign stuff to go through, and I shall need your help."

"Very well," answered Anice, and he could decipher neither disappointment nor any other emotion in those childlike brown eyes of hers.

"Lord!" he muttered to himself as she went out, "what a politician that woman would have made! The devil himself can't read her. If I had married a girl like that instead— I wonder if that heart-trouble of the wife's is ever likely to carry her off sudden."

An hour or so of sunlight remained. Anice, tired from her all-day confinement indoors, donned hat and jacket and sallied forth for a walk. She turned her steps northward toward the open country that lay beyond Pompton Avenue. There was a sting in the early fall air in that high latitude which made walking a pleasure. Moreover, after the atmosphere of work, tobacco, politics and reminiscences that had been her portion since early morning, it was a joy to be alone with the cool and the sweetness of the dying day. Besides, she wanted to think.

But the solitary stroll she had planned was not to be her portion, for, as she rounded the first corner, she came upon Clive Standish deep in talk with Ansel. Clive's tired eyes brightened at the sight of her. The look of weariness that had crept into the candidate's face since she had last seen him went straight to Anice's heart. With a hurried word of dismissal to his campaign manager, Standish left his companion and fell into step at Miss Lanier's side.

"This is better than I expected," said he. "I always manage to include Pompton Avenue in my tramps lately, but this is the first time I've caught a glimpse of you."

"You are looking badly," she commented. "You are working too hard."

"One must, in a fight like mine. It's nothing to what I must do during my tour. Everything depends on that. I start to-morrow."

"So soon? I'm sorry."

"Why?" he asked in some surprise.

"I'm afraid you'll find Mr. Conover stronger up-State than you think. I don't like to see you disappointed."

"You care?"

"Of course I do. I hate to see anyone disappointed."

"How delightfully impersonal!" grumbled Clive, in disgust.

"I thought you were averse to personalities. You've said so in both the speeches I've heard you make."

"You came to hear me? I——"

"One likes to keep abreast of the times; to hear both sides——"

"And having heard both——"

"One forms one's own conclusions."

"And yours are——"

"Quite formed."

"Anice!" exclaimed Standish impatiently, "nature never cut you out for a Sybil. Can't you be frank? If you only knew what your approval—your good wishes—mean to me, you would be kinder."

"There are surely enough people who encourage you and——"

"No, there are not. I want *your* encouragement, *your* faith; just as I had it when we were boy and girl together, you and I!"

"You forget, I am in the employ of Mr. Conover. As long as I accept his wages, would it be loyal of me to——"

"Then why accept them? If only——"

"One must make a living in some way. I have other reasons, too."

"That same wretched old mystery again! As for making a living, that's a different thing, and it has changed too many lives. Once, years ago, for instance, when I was struggling to make a living—and a bare, scant one at that—I kept silent when my heart clamored to speak. I kept silent because I had no right to ask any woman to share my hard luck. But now I'm on my feet. I've made the 'living' you talk about. And there's enough of it for two. So I——"

"I congratulate you on your success," said the girl nervously. "Here is my corner. I must hurry back. I've a long evening's work to——"

"Anice!"

"Good-by!"

"You *must* hear me. I——"

"Hello, Miss Lanier! Parleying with the enemy, eh? Come, come, that isn't playing square. 'Evening, Standish!"

Caleb Conover, crossing the street from the side entrance of his own grounds, had confronted the two before they noted his approach. Looking from one to the other, he grinned amusedly.

"I've heard there was more'n one leak in our camp," he went on, "but I never s'posed *this* was it."

Trembling with confusion, perhaps with some deeper emotion, Anice nevertheless answered coolly:

"I hope my absence hasn't delayed any of your work? I was on my way back, when you——"

"Now look at that," exclaimed Caleb with genuine admiration. "Here's my hated enemy as red and rattled as if I'd caught him stuffing ballot-boxes or cheering for Conover! And the lady in the case is as cool as cucumbers, and she don't bat an eye. Standish, she's seven more kinds of a man than you are, or ever will be, for all your big shoulders and bigger line of talk. Well, we won't keep you any longer, son. No use askin' you in, I s'pose? No? Then maybe I'll drop around to your meeting this evening. I'd 'a' come before, but it always makes me bashful to hear myself praised to the public. Good night."

It was late that evening when Clive reached his rooms, for a few brief hours of rest before setting forth on his tour of the State. He was tired out, discouraged, miserable. His much-heralded meeting had been the dreariest sort of fiasco. Scarcely had the opening address begun and the crowded house warmed up to the occasion, when every light in the building had been switched off.

Inquiry showed that a break had occurred in the gas mains which could not be remedied until morning. Candles and lamps were hurriedly sent for. Meantime, though a certain confusion followed the plunging of the place into darkness, the crowd had been, on the whole, orderly. In spite of this, the chief of police, with twenty reserves, coming on the scene, had ordered Standish civilly enough to dismiss the audience. Then the policemen had filed up on the stage, illumining it by their bull's-eye lanterns, and clustered ominously about the speakers.

In response to Clive's angry protest, the chief had simply reiterated his order, adding that his department was responsible for the city's peace and quiet, and that the crowd showed an inclination to riot. Nor could the Arm of the Law be shaken from this stand. The audience, during the colloquy between Standish and the chief had grown impatient, and an occasional catcall or shrill whistle had risen from the darkened auditorium. At each of these sounds the police had gripped their nightsticks and glanced with a fine apprehension at their leader for commands.

The upshot of the matter had been the forced dismissal of the spectators. Standish had scouted Ansel's suggestion that the whole catastrophe was a ruse of Conover's, until, as he walked down the dark aisle toward the door, he heard a policeman whisper:

"I was waitin' for the chief to give some of us the tip to pinch him."

"An' let him make a noise like a martyr?" grunted a second voice easily recognized as Billy Shevlin's. "You must think the Boss is as balmy in the belfry as you blue lobsters. He'd 'a' had Geoghegan broke if he'd——"

The rest of the reply had been lost.

No other disengaged hall could be found in the vicinity; and the meeting from which Clive had expected so much had gone by the board. He walked home in a daze of chagrin. How could he hope to fight a man who employed such weapons; who swayed such power in every city department; who thus early in the campaign showed plainly he would stop at nothing in beating his opponent?

Then the young candidate's teeth clenched tight, and the sullen grit that for so many centuries has carried the bulldog race of yellow-haired, strong-jawed Anglo-Saxons to victory against hopeless odds came to his aid. He shook his big shoulders as if tossing off some physical weight, entered his rooms and switched on the electric light.

On his study table lay a special delivery letter, neatly typewritten, as was the single long sheet of foolscap it contained. Standish glanced at the bottom of the page. There was no signature. Then he read:

"The date for the various county conventions has not been formally set. It is unofficially given as a week from Saturday. Instead, the caucus will be held in three of the eight counties *next* Saturday. The Machine's men know this. The League's don't. It will be sprung as a surprise, with two days' notice instead of the customary seven. This will keep many of the League's people from attending. At the Bowden and Jericho caucuses telegrams will be received saying you have withdrawn.

"At Matawan and Haldane the regular delegates will be notified to meet at the town halls. While they are waiting outside the locked front doors, the county chairman and his own crowd will step in the back way and hold their caucus and elect their delegates. Floaters will be brought into several counties. In Wills County the chairman will fail to hear the names of your delegates. Have your manager arrange for the Wills men to bolt at the right time. Force the State Committee *at once* to declare the date for the county conventions. Notify the League's men at Matawan and Haldane of the 'back door' trick, and have the telegraph operators at Jericho and Bowden warned not to receive or transmit any fake message of your withdrawal.

"On your State tour you will find newspapers closed to your speeches and advertisements, and a number of the halls engaged before you get to the town. Arrange for injunctions restraining the papers from barring your notices, and have someone go ahead of you to secure halls. And arrange for police protection to break up rowdyism at your meetings."

Clive Standish read and re-read this remarkable epistle. That it had come from the Conover camp he could not doubt. He had heard, before Caleb's hint of the previous afternoon, that there was a certain discontent and vague rumor of treachery, in more than one of the multifarious branches of the Boss's business and political interests. For the unexpected strength developed by the Civic League and the eloquence of its candidate had shaken divers of the enemy's less resolute followers, and more than one of these might readily seek to curry future favor with the winning side by casting just such an anchor to windward.

In any case, there was the letter. Its author's identity, for the moment, was of no great matter.

"Anonymous!" mused Standish, eyeing the missive with strong distaste. "Is it a trick of Conover's or a bit of treachery on the part of one of the men he trusts? In either case, there's only one course a white man can take with a thing of this kind."

Picking up the letter, he crumpled it into a ball and threw it into the fireplace.

" Better not say anything about it to Ansel," he decided as he watched the paper twist open under the heat and break into a blaze. " He'd only call me a visionary crank again. And if it's a trap, the precautions he'd take would play straight into Conover's hand."

Some blocks away, in his Pompton Avenue Mausoleum, the Railroader was giving final orders to the henchmen to whom he had intrusted the details of watching Standish's forthcoming tour. And some of these same details he had even intrusted to the unenthusiastic Gerald.

CHAPTER VI

CALEB WORKS AT LONG RANGE

Clive Standish opened his up-State tour the following night in the small town of Wayne. It was a farming centre, and the hall was tolerably well filled with bearded and tanned men who had an outdoor look. Some of them had brought their wives; sallow, dyspeptic, angular creatures with the patient, dull faces of women who live close to nature and are too busy to profit thereby.

The audience listened interestedly as Clive outlined the Boss-ridden condition of the Mountain State, the exorbitant cost of transporting and handling agricultural products, the unjust taxes that fell so heavily on the farmer and wage-earner, the false system of legislation and the betrayal of the people's rights by the men they were bamboozled into electing to represent them and protect their interests. He went on to tell how New York and other States had from time to time risen and shaken off a similar yoke of Bossism, and to show how, both materially and in point of self-respect, the voters of the Mountain State could profit by following such examples. In closing he briefly described the nature, aims and purposes of the Civic League and the practical reforms to which he himself stood pledged.

It did Clive's heart good to see how readily his audience responded in interest to his pleas. He had not spoken ten minutes before he felt he had his house with him. He finished amid a salvo of applause. His hearers flocked about him as he came down from the platform, shaking his hand, asking him questions, praising his discourse.

One big farmer slapped him on the back, crying:

"You're all right, Mr. Standish! If you can carry out all you've promised, I guess Wills County'll stand by you, solid. But why on earth didn't you advertise you was comin' to Wayne to-night? If it hadn't 'a' been for your agent that passed through here yesterday and told some of the boys at the hotel and the post office, you wouldn't 'a' had anyone to hear you. If we'd known what was comin', this hall'd 'a' been packed."

"But surely you read my advertisements in your local papers?" exclaimed Clive, "I——"

"We sure didn't read anything of the

kind," retorted a dairyman. "I read everything in the *Wayne Clarion*, from editorials to soap ads., an' there hasn't been a line printed about your meetin'."

"I sent my agent ahead to place paid advertisements with every paper along my route," said the puzzled Standish. "And you say he was in town here yesterday. So he couldn't have skipped Wayne. I'll drop in on the editor of the *Clarion* on my way to the station and ask him why the advertisement was overlooked."

Accordingly, a half hour later, en route for the midnight train, Standish sought out the *Clarion* office and demanded an interview with its editor-in-chief.

"I guess that's me," observed a fat, shirt-sleeved man, who looked up from his task of tinkering with a linotype machine's inner mysteries. "I'm Mr. Gerrett, editor-in-chief, managing editor, city editor, too. My repertorial staff's out to supper, this being pay day and he being hungry. Were you wanting to subscribe or—? Take a chair, anyhow," he broke off, sweeping a pile of proofs off a three-legged stool. "Now, what can I do for you?"

"My name is Standish," began Clive, "and I called to find out why——"

"Oh!"

The staccato monosyllable served as clearing house for all Gerrett's geniality, for he froze—as much as a stout and perspiring man can—into editorial super-dignity. Aware that the atmosphere had congealed, but without understanding why, Clive continued:

"My agent called here, did he not? And left an advertisement of——"

"Yes," snapped Gerrett, "he did. I was out. He left it with my foreman with the cash for it. I mailed a check for the amount this morning to your League headquarters at Granite."

"But why? The advert——"

"The ad.'s in my waste-basket. Now, as this is my busy night, maybe you'll clear out and let——"

"Look here!" said Clive, sternly, and refusing to notice the opened door, "what does this mean?"

"It means we don't want your ads. nor your money."

"Were you too crowded for space and had to leave the advertisement out?"

"No, we weren't. We don't want any dealings with you or the alleged 'League' you're running. That's all. Ain't that plain enough?"

"No," answered Clive, trying to keep cool, "I want a reason."

"You'll keep on wanting it, then. I'm boss of this office, and——"

"The *real* boss? I doubt it. If you were, what reason would you have for turning away paid advertisements? I may do you an injustice, my friend, but I think you're acting under orders."

"You're off!" shouted Gerrett, reddening. "I run this paper as I choose. And I don't take orders from any man. I——"

"Nor passes? Nor freight rebates on paper rolls, and——"

"D'ye mean to insult me?" bellowed Gerrett, wallowing forward, threatening as a fat black thundercloud. "I'll have you know——"

"I don't think," replied Clive, calmly, and receding not a step, "I don't think you *could* be insulted, Mr. Gerrett. You are making rather a pitiable exhibition of yourself. Why not own up to it that you are acting under orders of the 'Machine,' whose tool you are? The 'Machine' which is so afraid of the truth that it takes pains to muzzle the press. The 'Machine' that is so well aware of its own rottenness, it dare not let the people whom it is defrauding hear the other side of the case. Why not admit you are bought?"

Gerrett was sputtering unintelligible wrath.

"Get out of my office!" he roared at last.

"Certainly," assented Standish, "I've learned all I wanted to. You serve your masters well. I hope they pay you as adequately."

He turned to the door. Before he reached it a thin youth with ink-smears on his fingers swung in.

"Hard luck!" exclaimed the newcomer. "That Standish meeting's raised a lot of interest downtown. Pity we can't run anything on it! It'd make a dandy first-page spread."

"Shut up!" bellowed Gerrett. "You young——"

"Don't scold him," counselled Standish, walking out. "He didn't make any break. We're all three in the secret."

The next few days witnessed practical repetitions of the foregoing experiences. In almost every town the local newspapers not only refused to report a line of Standish's speeches, but would not accept his advertisements. Nor, in most places, could he find a job office willing to print handbills for him. His agent had nearly everywhere been able to engage a hall; but as no adequate preliminary notice of the meeting had been published, audiences were pitiably slim. In one or two towns, where the papers did not belong to the " Machine," it was discovered that every hall, lodgeroom or other available meeting-place had been engaged in advance by some mysterious competitor. Clive, at such settlements, was forced to speak in open air. Even then the police at one town dispersed the gathering under excuse of fearing a riot; at two others the mayor refused a license to hold an outdoor meeting, and at a fourth, a gang of toughs, at long range, pelted the audience with stones and elderly eggs, the police refusing to interfere.

At length Clive's advance agent returned to the candidate in abject despair.

" I've been doing this sort of work eight years," the man reported, " but this time I'm clean stumped. I can't make any headway. The papers, the city authorities, the opera-house-and-hall-proprietors and the police are all under Conover's thumb. It's got so that as soon as I reach a town I can find out right away who is and who isn't in the ' Machine's ' pay. Where the papers aren't muzzled—and there are precious few such places—the halls are closed to us, and either the mayor or the police will stop the meeting. Where the papers are working for Conover, we can get all the halls we want, because the Boss knows the news of your speech can't circulate except by word of mouth.

"Oh, they've got us whipsawed in grand shape! I'm wondering what'll happen at Grafton Monday night. That's the biggest city next to Granite, and there's always been more or less of a kick there against Conover rule. They've got a square man for mayor, and one of their three newspapers is strong for you. I was able to get the opera house, too. It's your big chance of the campaign, and your last chance on this tour. The rest of the towns on your route I can't do anything with. I'm waiting to see what dirty game Conover will play at Grafton, now that he can't work his usual tricks there. He'll be sure to try something."

Billy Shevlin, who had also acted (unsuspectedly as unofficially) as advance agent of Clive Standish's tour, had in three respects excelled the authorized agent: In the first place, he had been as successful as the other had been a failure. In the second, he had not turned back. Third, and last, he was not in the very least discouraged. Nor had he need to be.

Yet even to him Grafton presented the first serious problem. And to it he devoted much of his time and more of his cleverness. At last he formed a plan and saw that his plan was good.

Clive reached Grafton at noon of the day he was scheduled to speak. This was the second largest city in the Mountain State. Here, next to Granite, must the chief battle of the campaign be waged. On the effect of his speech here hung a great percentage of Clive's hopes for the coming State convention. As Grafton went, so would big Matawan County, whose centre it was. And Grafton, wavering in fealty to Conover, might yet be won to the Standish ranks by the right sort of speech. So with the glow of approaching struggle upon him Clive awaited the night. All he asked was a fair hearing. This, presumably, was for once to be accorded him.

At the hotel on his arrival he found Karl Ansel waiting. The big, lean New Englander was in a state of white-hot wrath.

"You got my telegram and the notice of the caucuses, I suppose!" he growled as Clive met him.

"No. I ordered all mail forwarded here, and telegrams, too. I broke away from my route Saturday, when I found I couldn't get a hall at Smithfield. I cancelled my date there and went over to Deene, leaving word for everything to be sent on to Grafton. Then, yesterday——"

"Never mind that. We're done! Beat! Tricked!"

"What do you mean?"

" The county conventions—the caucuses! In every—nearly every one of the eight counties Conover worked some blackguardism. To some he sent telegrams that you backed out. In others his chairmen tried the ' back door ' act. And I wrote you how they'd ' snapped ' the dates and caught us unready. Then——"

Clive recalled the anonymous letter which later events had driven from his memory. If only he had been able to lower himself to his opponent's level and take advantage of it—of the treachery in the Conover ranks! If——

But Ansel was still pouring out the flood of his ill-temper.

" Whipsawed us, right and left," he declared. " Beat us at every point as easy as taking candy from a baby. What are *we* doing in politics? We're a lot of silly amateurs against——"

" We're a lot of honest men against a gang of crooks. And in the long run we'll win. We——"

" The long run, eh? Well, the run has begun, and they've got us on it. We're beat! "

" Poor old Ansel," laughed Clive, " how many times during the past fortnight have I heard you say that? And every time you pick yourself up again and go on with the fight. Just as you'll do now."

" Not on your life! I—oh, well, I suppose

I will, if it comes to that! But it's a burning, blazing shame."

"If it wasn't for just such 'burning, blazing shames,' there'd be no need for our campaign. It's to crush such 'shames' that we're working. Cheer up! I've great hopes for to-night's meeting."

Tersely he described his trip, the drawbacks he had encountered, and the better chances that seemed to attend the Grafton rally, Ansel interspersing the tale with a volley of queries and expletives.

"I'd heard of this press-muzzling," said he as Standish ended, "and I have one way of blocking it. I've arranged for your speeches and 'ads.' and advance notices to be printed in the biggest paper in the next State, and scattered all through the Mountain State as campaign documents. I don't think even Conover can block that move."

"Splendid!" cried Standish. "Old man, you're a genius!"

"No, I'm not," contradicted Ansel, rather ruefully, "but someone else is. I don't know who."

"I don't understand."

"Why, the idea was sent to me three days ago, anonymously. Typewritten on foolscap. No signature. What d'you think of that?"

"Anonymously?"

" Yes. I wonder why. The idea's so good, one would think the originator'd claim it. Unless——"

" Unless it came from the Conover camp? "

" Just what occurred to *me*. Anyhow, I've adopted the suggestion. I suppose *you'd* have refused to accept anonymous help, eh? "

" Every man to his own folly. It's done now."

" It sure is. And with a few more such tips, Conover would be ' done,' too. He's carried matters high-handedly for years, but now maybe someone he's ridden rough-shod over has turned on him."

The great night had come. Clive and Ansel, arriving at the Opera House, found that gaudy, gayly-lighted auditorium full to the doors. On the stage sat the mayor, the proprietor of one of the papers, a half dozen clergymen and a score of civic dignitaries. The boxes were filled with well-dressed women. Evening suits blended with the less conspicuous costumes of the spectators who stretched from stage to entrance, from orchestra to roof. A band below the stage played popular and national airs.

The news of Clive's eccentric pre-convention tour, of his eloquence, his clean manliness and the obstacles he had overcome, had drawn hundreds through sheer curiosity. More had come because they were weary of Conover's rule and eagerly desired to learn what his young antagonist had to offer them in place of bossism.

Skilled, by experience, in reading the sentiment of crowds, Clive, as he stepped onto the stage, felt instinctively that the main body of the house was kindly disposed toward him. Not only was this proven by the spontaneous applause that heralded his appearance, but by a ripple—a rustle—of interest that rose on every hand. The sound nerved him. He considered once more how much hung on to-night's success or failure, and the advance augury was as music to his ears.

The mayor, a little, nervous man with a monstrous mustache and a cast in one eye, opened the meeting with a brief speech, defining the purpose of the evening, and ended by introducing the candidate. Clive came forward. A volley of applause such as he had never before known hailed him. He bowed and bowed again, waiting for it to subside. But it did not. It continued from every quarter of the house.

From pleasure Clive felt a growing uneasiness. The majority of the audience seemed to have relapsed into silence, and were staring about them in wonder at the unduly continued ovation. The thumping of feet and canes and the shouts of welcome increased rather than diminished. It settled down into a steady volume of sound, regular and rhythmic, shaking the whole auditorium, losing any hint at spontaneity and degenerating into a deafening, organized babel.

The men on the platform glanced at each other in angry bewilderment. For fully ten minutes the tumult endured, rendering intelligible words out of the question. The mayor, as chairman, rapped for silence. But his efforts were vain. The sound was drowned in the vaster, reëchoing volume of rhythmic sound. Clive held up his hand with a gesture of authority. The applause doubled.

This was growing absurd. The quiet majority of the audience waxed restive, and half-rose in its seats to locate the disturbance. To end the embarrassing delay Standish began to speak, hoping the clamor would die down. But his words did not reach the second row of seats.

Ansel slipped forward to his side.

"This is a put-up job!" he exclaimed, shouting to make himself heard above the uproar. "They are pretending to applaud because they think you dare not call them down for that. They'll keep it up all evening if they get a chance, and you won't be able to speak ten words."

In a front orchestra seat a man stood up waving a flag and bawling:

"*Standish! Standish! We want* STANDISH!"

The rest of Billy Shevlin's carefully drilled cohorts took up the cry, and it was chanted a hundred times to the accompaniment of resounding sticks and boot heels.

The mayor beckoned a deputy sheriff from the wings. Pointing to the front-seat ringleader he commanded:

"Put that fellow out."

The deputy descended the steps to the orchestra, grabbed the vociferating enthusiast by the collar and started to propel him up the aisle. In an instant, as though the action were a signal, every sound ceased. The house was as still as death. And through the silence soared the shrill, penetrating protest of the man who had just been collared.

"You leave me be!" he yelled. "I've got as much right here as you have. An' I'm earnin' my money."

"What money?" shouted a trained querist in the gallery.

"The cash Mr. Standish promised me for leadin' the applause, of course. He's payin' me an' the rest of the boys good, an' we're goin' to earn our dough. *Standish! Standish! We want——*"

Then pandemonium broke loose. Hundreds of voices caught up the rhythmic refrain, while hundreds more shrieked "Fake!" and a counter rhythm arose of

"*Fake! Fake! Fake! Fake!* FAKE!"

Standish, abandoning all present hope of making the audience understand that the shrill-voiced man was a hireling of Conover's, and that the whole affair was a gigantic, well-rehearsed trick, turned to face the group on the platform. But there, at a glance, he read in a dozen pairs of eyes suspicion, contempt, disgust.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Standish," sneered the little mayor, "that your friends are over-zealous in earning their——"

"Do you mean that you—that *anybody*—can believe such an absurdity?" cried Standish. "Can't you see——?"

"I can only see," said the mayor, rising, "that I have evidently misunderstood the purpose and nature of this meeting. Good night."

To Clive's horror the little dignitary walked off the stage, followed by two-thirds of those who had sat there with him. The majority of the boxes' occupants followed suit. The few who remained on the platform did so, to judge from their expression, more from interest in the outcome of the riotous audience's antics than through any faith in Clive. For by this time the erstwhile orderly place was in full riot. Individual fights and tussles were waging here and there. Men were shouting aimlessly. Women were screaming. People were hurrying in a jostling, confused mass up the aisles toward the exits, while others bellowed to them to sit still or move faster. And through all (both factions of shouters having united in a common slogan) rang to an accompaniment of smashing chairs and pounding feet that endless metrical refrain of

"*Fake! Fake! Fake! Fake!* FAKE!"

Standish, Ansel at his side, was once more at the platform's edge, striving in vain to send his mighty voice through the cataract of noise. One tough, in the pure joy of living and rioting, had climbed over the rail of a proscenium box—the only one still occupied—and, throwing an arm about the neck of a young girl, sitting there with an elderly man and woman, tried to kiss her. The girl screamed. Her elderly escort thrust the rowdy backward, and the latter, his insecure balance on the box-rail destroyed, tumbled down among the orchestra chairs. The scene was greeted with a howl of delight from kindred spirits.

The youth scrambled to his feet and, joined by a half dozen intimates, once more swarmed up the side of the box. The girl shrank back, and futilely tugged at the closed box door, which had become jammed. The old man, quivering with senile fury, leaned over the box-front and grappled the foremost assailant. He was brushed aside and, amid a hurricane of laughter from the paid phalanx in the gallery, the group of half-drunk, wholly-inspired young brutes clustered across the box rail. The whole incident had not occupied five seconds. Yet it had served to draw the multi-divided attention of the mob and the rest of the escaping audience to that particular and new point of interest And now, dozens of the tougher element, seeing a prospect of better sport than a mere campaign row, elbowed their way to the spot.

The girl's cry and that of the woman with her had barely reached the stage when Clive Standish, with one tremendous spring, had cleared the six-foot distance between footlights and box. There was a confused, whirling, cursing mass of bodies and arms. Then the whole group rolled outward over the rail.

Before they had fairly touched ground Clive was on his feet, the centre of a surprised but bellicose swirl of opponents who were nothing loath to change their plan of baiting a well-dressed girl into the more thrilling pastime of beating a well-dressed candidate.

As the score of toughs rushed him, Clive had barely time to get his back into the shallow angle between the bulging outer bases of the two proscenium boxes. Then the rush was upon him.

Hitting clean and straight, and with the speed and unerring deadliness of the trained heavyweight boxer, Clive for the moment held his own. There was no question of guarding. He relied rather for protection on the unusual length of his arms.

Nor could a blow be planned beforehand. It was hit, hit, and keep on hitting. Fully twenty youths and men surged forward at him, and at nearly every blow one went down among the pushing throng. But for each who fell there were always two more to take his place. The impact and crash of blows sounded above the yells and shuffle of feet. This was not boxing. It was butchery.

Only his semi-sheltered position and the self-confusing hurry and numbers of his assailants kept Clive on his feet and allowed him to hold his own.

Yet, as he dimly realized even through the wild lust of battle that gripped and intoxicated him, the fight was but a question of moments. Soon someone, running in, must grapple or trip him, or a kick would reach and disable him. And once down, in that bedlam of stamping, kicking feet, his life would not be worth a scrap of paper.

While it lasted, though, it was glorious. The veneered shell of civilization had been battered away. He was primitive man, gigantic, furious, terrible; battling against hopeless odds. Yet battling (as had those ancestors from whom his yellow hair, great shoulders and bulldog jaw were inherited) all the more gladly and doughtily because of those very odds.

He was aware of a man who, running along the box rail from the stage, had dropped to his side and stood swinging a gilded, blue-cushioned box-chair about his head. This apparition and the whizzing sweep of his odd weapon caused the toughs to give back for an instant.

"Good old Ansel!" panted Clive.

"Save your breath!" grunted Karl. "You'll need it."

Then a yell from twenty throats and the rush was on again. At first, anticipating the easy triumph which their type so love, the toughs had turned from the milder fun of frightening a girl of the better class to the momentary work of thrashing the solitary man who had interfered with that simple amusement. Now, bleeding faces, swollen eyes and more than one fractured jaw and nose had transformed the earlier phase of rough spirits into one of murderous rage.

The man who had so mercilessly punished them must not be allowed to escape alive. The tough never fights fair. When fists fail, a gouge, bite or kick is considered quite allowable. When, as in the present instance, the intended victim is so protected as to render these tactics difficult of success, pockets are usually ransacked for more formidable weapons.

Ansel's arrival on the scene had but checked the onrush. No two men, big and powerful as both were, could subdue nor hold out against that assault.

Clive struck, right, left, with the swiftness of thought. And each blow crashed into yielding, reeling flesh.

Down whirled Ansel's chair on the bullet head of one man, and down went the man beneath the impact.

Up whirled the chair and again it descended on another head—descended and shivered into kindling wood.

Dropping the fragments, Karl ranged close to Clive and together the two struck out, the one with the wild force and fury of a kicking horse, the other with the colder but no less terrific accuracy of the trained athlete.

A tough, ducking one of Ansel's wild swings, ran in and caught him about the waist. Doubling his left leg under him, Karl caught the man's stomach with the point of his knee. The assailant collapsed, gasping. But the momentary lapse of the tall New Englander's fistic attack had opened a breach through which two more men rushed and flung themselves bodily on him.

Clive, unaware of his ally's plight, yet felt the increased impetus of the onslaught on himself, and had to rally his every faculty to withstand it. His breath was coming hard from his heaving chest, and his head swam with fatigue and excitement. More than one heavy blow had reached his face and body. Then——

"Clear the way there, youse!" howled an insane, mumbling voice "Lemme at 'im! I'll pay 'im for this smashed jaw!"

The press immediately in front of Clive Standish slackened and the crowd opened. In its centre reeled a horrible figure—blood-stained, torn of clothing, raging and distorted of face, one hand nursing an unshaven jaw, while the other flourished a revolver.

"Lemme at 'im!" mumbled the pain-maddened tough through a hedge of splintered teeth. "Clear the way or I'll shoot to clear!"

Then, finding himself directly in front of Standish, the maniac halted and levelled his weapon.

Something swished through the air from behind Clive's head. A big shapeless object hurtled forward and smote the broken-jawed tough full across the eyes on the very instant he fired at point blank range.

The ball went wild, and surprise at the odd blow he had received (apparently from nowhere), caused the man's pistol to clatter to the ground.

The girl in the box—innocent cause of the whole battle—had paid her debt to the man who had imperilled his life in her defence. She had crouched, trembling, in the background watching the progress of the fray. But as the intended murderer's trigger-finger had tightened, she had hurled at his face, with all her frail force, the huge bouquet she carried. For once a woman's aim was unerring, and thereby a man's life was saved.

Her act—melodramatic, amazing, unlooked-for, eccentric in its poetic justice and theatric effects—sent a roar of applause from the onlookers, even as the pistol-shot momentarily startled the group of ruffians into sanity. Clive, without awaiting the result of the shot, had flung himself upon the little knot of toughs who were locked in death-grip about Ansel.

But even as he did so, a cry of warning rang from a dozen parts of the big building:

"The cops! Lights out! The cops!"

The hastily-summoned cohort of blue-coated reserves, pistols and nightsticks drawn, charged down the centre aisle. And before their onset the rabble melted like snow in April.

The historic Grafton Opera House riot was a thing of the past.

An hour later Clive Standish sat alone in his hotel room. Ansel had just said good night to him and left him to his own miserable reflections.

Now that the excitement was over, he had time to realize what a ghastly failure, from a campaign standpoint, his Grafton meeting had been. It was the climax of his long, unbroken series of failures. He was beaten, and he could no longer force himself to think otherwise.

Heart and mind and pride were as sore as the aching, bruised face and body from which he had so recently washed the stains of battle.

At other towns he had scored nothing worse than failure. Here at Grafton Conover had gained yet another point. The Railroader had made the people look on his young opponent as a cheap trickster. The very class Clive was working to rescue from Boss misrule would brand him as a charlatan.

Yes, he was beaten. How could a man hope by clean methods to stand against such powers as Caleb Conover possessed, and did not scruple to use? The fight had been hard. And now it was over. He had done his best. No one could have done more. And he had failed.

The reaction from the violent physical and mental strain of the riot was upon Standish. Hope, vitality, even self-trust were at their very ebb.

A knock sounded at the door.

" Come in," he called wearily, supposing Ansel was coming back for something he had left.

" Thanks, I will," replied Billy Shevlin, sidling into the room and closing the door behind him.

Clive stared in blank astonishment at his unexpected visitor. The latter grinned pleasantly and sat himself down, unasked, in a chair near the door, tucking his derby hat between his feet.

" Good evening, Mr. Standish," said Billy. " Pleased to see you again. ' Same here,' says you," he added, after an embarrassed little pause which Clive made no move to break.

"What do you want?" asked the candidate at last.

"Just a little gabfest with you. That's all. I——"

"You come with a message from Mr. Conover?"

"Not me. I ain't seen the Boss this ten days."

"I thought you were his special henchman," said Clive, amused in spite of himself by the heeler's ingratiating manner, and puzzled as to the cause of this midnight call.

"The Boss's *what?*" queried Billy.

"His 'henchman,' I said. Aren't——"

"No, I ain't. I don't know just what a hench-person is, but *I* ain't one. This ain't the first time I've been called that. Some day when I get time I'm goin' to look it up in the dicshunary. An' if it means what I think it does, I'm going to lick——"

"I wouldn't bother if I were you. But you haven't told me why you're here."

"Well," responded Shevlin, with an air of casting all possible reserve to the winds, "I wanted you to kind of get a line on what you're up against. Why not take your medicine graceful and quit?"

"Is that any affair of yours?"

" Sure, it's my affair. Do you s'pose I'm settin' here just to hand out ree-fined conversation with you this time of night? You've put me to a whole lot of bother lately, Mr. Standish. I've had all I could do sometimes to block the game ahead of you on this tour. An' then, to-night——"

" So it was you——"

" I done my best," assented Shevlin modestly.

" Hold on! " he continued, as Clive jumped up. " Hold on, Mr. Standish! Don't you get wedded to the idee that 'twas me who kicked up that row over the girl nor the scrap that followed. That ain't my line. The Boss'll skin me alive fer lettin' you make such a pose in the limelight as you did when you butted in as the heero and copped off that rescue. All *I* did was to organize the cheerin' party, and post that guy what to say when he was nabbed. I'd 'a' got away with it all without a break, at that, only this Grafton gang ain't got no ree-finement. They has to go an' make a toad-pie of the whole party."

Clive sat down again. He realized that the little heeler, for his own interest, was telling the truth in disclaiming all share in the riot's later stages. He was curious, too, to learn what else Shevlin had to say.

"So it was a Pyrrhic victory for you after all, you think?" suggested Standish.

"Pyrrhic?" mused Billy, thoughtfully. "Must 'a' run on some of the Western tracks. No skate of that name ever won a vict'ry here in the East. Someone's been stringin' you about that, I guess, Mr. Standish."

"Perhaps so. And you've come to suggest that I withdraw? Why should I?"

"'Cause you ain't got the chance a snowball has on the south slopes of Satanville. Come! Drop out an' let's have no hard feelin'. Conover's got ten times your strength everywhere. An' the strong man's always the man that'll win. You can dope that out——"

"Not always. There was David's fight with Goliath, for one, and——"

"David who?"

"A little chap who won out against a man double his size," smiled Clive. "Goliath was what you'd call a heavyweight."

"An' what was David's manager doin', puttin' a bantam into the ring with a heavyweight? He'd 'a' had that David person asleep in the first round. Say, Mr. Standish, I seen to-night you're a first-rate scrapper, an' you handle your hands fine for an amachoor. But what you don't know about prizefights an' racehorses'd fill a City Record.

Someone's sure been guying you good an' plenty."

"Well, all that has nothing to do with what you came here about. You've got something on your mind. Speak out, can't you?"

"It's just this," replied Shevlin, edging his chair nearer, and lowering his voice, "you're beat. An' you've been to consid'ble expense in the campaign, an'——"

"Yes?"

"An' Mr. Conover's set his heart on bein' Gov'nor by a good majority. An' when he sets his heart on a thing he's willin' to pay well for it."

"Yes?"

"So," continued Billy, emboldened by Clive's calmness, "what's the matter with you an' him fixin' this thing up peaceable?"

"How?"

"I've got a blank check here. It was give me for expenses. Shows how the Boss trusts me, eh? Well, I'm willin' to fill this out for $5,000 if you say, an——"

Then Clive Standish picked up his caller very gently by the nape of the neck, carried him tenderly to the door, opened it and deposited him in the hall outside.

Returning, he shut the door, crossed over to his bath-room and washed his hands.

"Beaten?" he murmured to himself, all

his fatigue and discouragement forgotten. “ Not yet! When they find it worth while to try to buy me off it shows they’re still afraid. I’m in for another try at this uphill game. But first of all I’ll see Caleb Conover face to face and have it out with him. I wonder,” he speculated less belligerently, “ I wonder if Anice will happen to be in when I go there? ”

CHAPTER VII

CALEB UNDERGOES A "HOME EVENING"

"THERE'S no use glowering at *me* every time you speak of poor Clive," protested Mrs. Conover with all the fierce courage of a chased guinea-pig. "It isn't *my* fault he's running against you, and it isn't my fault that he's my nephew, either."

"I guess both those failings would come under the head of misfortunes, rather'n faults," retorted Caleb. "And they're both as hard on him as they are on you, Letty. I wasn't glowering at you, either. Don't stir up another spat."

The idea that Mr. Conover was capable of inciting any such disputation so flattered that poor, spiritless little creature that she actually bridled and looked about her to make sure Anice and Gerald, the only other members of the household present, had heard.

The quartette were seated in the Conover library, whither they had gathered after dinner for one of those brief intervals of family intercourse which Caleb secretly loved, his wife as secretly dreaded and Gerald openly loathed. The Railroader, at heart, was an intensely home-loving man. He had never known a home. Least of all since moving into the Mausoleum. He had always, in increasingly blundering fashion, sought to make one.

The wife he bullied, the son he hectored, the daughter with whom he had forever quarrelled, the secretary who met his friendliness with unbroken reserve; all these he had tried to enroll as assistants in his various home-making plans. The results had not been so successful as to warrant description.

Finally, Conover had centred his former efforts on one daily plan. He had read in the advice column of the *Star* about the joys of "pleasant evening hour in the bosom of one's family" and the directions therefor. The idea appealed to him. He ordained accordingly that after the unfashionably early evening meal the household should congregate in the library, and there for at least one hour indulge in carefree confidential chat. This, Caleb mentally argued, was a capital opening wedge in the inculcation of the true home-spirit which had been his lifelong dream.

The household obeyed the order, even as all Conover's orders—at home and abroad—were obeyed. The session usually began in laborious efforts at small talk. Then an unfortunate remark of some sort from Mrs. Conover, or an impertinence or sneer from Gerald, and the storm would break. The "pleasant evening hour" oftener than not ended in a sea of weakly miserable tears from Mrs. Conover, a cowed or *sotto voce* profane exit on Gerald's part, and in Caleb's stamping off to his study or else around to the Kerrigans' for a blissful, shirt-sleeved, old-time political argument in front of the saloon's back-room stove.

On this present evening Caleb had just received Shevlin's report of the Standish tour. He was full of the theme and strove to interest his three hearers in it. In Anice he found, as ever, an eager listener. But Gerald yawned in very apparent boredom, while Mrs. Conover shed a few delightfully easy, but irritating tears at the account of the opera house fight. Caleb had silently resented these moist signs of interest, and his glare had called forth an unusual protest from his weak little spouse.

"I'm sure," she went on, nervously taking advantage of the rare fit of courage that possessed her, "I'm *quite* sure somebody else must have put this Governorship idea into poor Clive's head. He'd never have thought of such a rash thing by himself. I don't believe that at heart he really wants to be Governor at all. He——"

" If he don't," remarked Conover, " I guess that makes it unanimous. I wish that idiot Shevlin hadn't given him the chance to play to the gallery, though, in a fist fight. It'll mean votes for him. Folks have a sort of liking for a man who can scrap. By the way, Jerry, if you go around to Headquarters to-night, tell Bourke I want him to run to Matawan for me to-morrow on that floater business. He——"

" I don't believe they can spare Bourke at Headquarters just now," began Gerald, with a faint show of interest. " You see——"

" If he was the sort of man they could spare, he wouldn't be the sort of man I'd want to send on a ticklish job like this. Has Brayle showed up at any of our rallies yet? "

" No. And I don't believe he will. He's done with politics, Shevlin tells me. Got religion, Billy says, and——"

" If Pete Brayle's got religion, you can gamble he's got it in his wife's name, like every other asset of his. ' Done with politics,' eh? Well, politics ain't done with him. I'll see Shevlin about it in the morning."

" I thought Mr. Brayle was an atheist," put in Letty. " It's an awful thing to be. How do you suppose he ever became one? "

"By thinking too hard with a mind that was too small; same as most atheists do," suggested Caleb. "Say, Jerry," he added, "it won't do you no harm to know I'm rather tickled at the way you've took hold at Headquarters this past week or so. You won't lose by it."

"She wrote me to," answered Gerald, flushing. "You owe it to *her*. Not to me."

"She?"

"Yes. My——"

"Ugh! I might 'a' known it! Well, so long as you do your work I don't care where the inspiration comes from. I ain't too finicky to hit a straight blow with a crooked stick. Why'd she tell you to hustle?"

"She said she 'hoped it would touch your hard heart.' Wait, and I'll read you what she——"

"No, you won't. My hardness of heart isn't a patch on my hardness of hearing when it comes to listening to that sort of pink paper drivel. I——"

"Now, father," whined Mrs. Conover, persuasively, "why be so hard on the poor boy? Perhaps——"

"Perhaps he's wheedled you into thinking a yeller-haired high-kicker would make the ideel daughter-in-law for the next Governor of the Mountain State. But his golden eloquence hasn't caught *me* yet. So, as long as there's one sane member of the Conover family——"

"Oh, Caleb, how can you treat your own child——"

"Yes!" snorted Caleb, "my own children have a right to expect a fine line of treatment from me, haven't they? Blanche and Jerry, both. What is it Ibid says about 'A serpent's tooth and a thankless——'"

"That was Shakespeare," contradicted Mrs. Conover, with the tact that was her chief charm. "And you've got it all wrong. There's no such person as——"

"I tell you it was Ibid," growled Caleb, always tender on the subject of his learning. "It says so in the 'Famous Quotation' book. Maybe you can look down on my education. But I guess I can stand pat all right on the things I *have* learned. And——"

The butler entered with a card, which he carried to Caleb. After one glance at the pasteboard Caleb crushed it in his fingers and threw it to the floor.

"Turn her out!" he ordered.

"Why, who is it?" squeaked his wife in high excitement.

"It's some woman for Jerry. Gaines brought me the card by mis——"

"For me?" cried Gerald, jumping up, his face aflame. "Why, it—it can't——"

"Yes, it can. And it is, or rather it *was,* for I've sent her away. Maybe you forget I made you promise——"

"Stand aside!" spake a dramatic contralto voice from beyond the portières, "I have a right here."

The curtains were thrust apart, revealing the protesting, discomfited butler; and, pushing past him, a tall, slender young woman, quietly but prettily dressed, pompadoured of hair, and very, *very* determined of aspect.

"Good Lord!" grunted Caleb under his breath, "she ain't even a blonde. I thought they all——"

But she was in the library itself, and facing the amazed master of the house. Gerald, at first sight of her, had sprung forward and now grasped the newcomer ardently by both hands and drew her to him.

"I was sure," murmured the intruder in that same throaty contralto, rich, yet insensibly conveying a vague impression of latent vulgarity, "I was *sure* your man was mistaken, and that you couldn't have meant to turn me away without a word when I had come so far to see my precious truant boy. *Did* you? We women, Mrs. Conover," she went on, eyes and voice claiming alliance of the meek-faced little nonentity who shrank behind Anice Lanier, " we women understand how hard it is to keep away from the man who has taught us to love him. *Don't* we? Men never can *quite* realize that. Not even my Gerald, or he wouldn't have stayed away so long or made me stay away from him. *Would* he? "

" It was Dad," broke in Gerald. " I told you that in my first letter, darling. He won't stand for our marriage, and——"

" Ah! that is because he doesn't know," she laughed archly. " Mr. Conover, this big splendid boy of mine is too much in love to explain as he should. And he's so high-spirited, he can't listen as patiently to advice as he ought to. *Can* you, Gerald? So I came myself, when I couldn't stand it any longer to be away from him. I knew I could make you understand. *Can't* I? "

" I can tell better when you've tried," answered Caleb, watching with a sort of awed fascination the alternate plunges and rearings of the vibrant black pompadour, which, in deference to the prevailing style of the moment—and of the chorus—was pendent directly above the visitor's right eye.

His curt rejoinder rather took the caller aback. She looked about the group as if for inspiration. Anice Lanier had risen, and was at the door. Caleb saw her.

"Please don't go, Miss Lanier!" he called.

"I would much prefer to," answered Anice, "if you don't object. This seems to be purely a family affair and——"

"And at least one person with a decently-balanced brain ought to be present. Our affairs are *your* affairs as far as you'll allow. Please do me the favor of staying."

The visitor had, by this diversion, regained grasp on her plan of action.

"Mr. Conover," she said, stretching out her suède-gloved hands toward the Railroader in a pretty gesture of helpless appeal as to an all-powerful judge, "I am your son's wife. He loves me. I love him. Does that tell you nothing?"

"Yes," said Caleb judicially, "it tells me you love each other; if that's what you mean. For the sake of argument we'll take that for granted, just for the present. Now get down to facts."

"I am your son's wife," repeated the woman, somewhat less throatily, but still with brave resolve. "He sought me out and wooed me. He told me I should receive a welcome in his home. He made me love him. *Didn't* you, Gerald? And I married him. Ah, but we were happy, we two! Then, like a thunderbolt from the blue sky fell your command that we part. He and I. For long—oh, *so* long—I have tried to be patient, to wait for time to soften your heart. But at last I couldn't bear it. I couldn't *bear* it, so I came here to meet you in person, to cast myself at your feet if need be. To——"

She paused. The cold, inscrutable gaze of the Railroader's light eyes did not tend to inspire her very creditable recitation. As a matter of fact, Caleb was at the moment paying very little attention to her words. He was noting the hard dryness of her skin and the only half-hidden lines about mouth, brow and eye; and contrasting them with Anice Lanier's baby-smooth skin and the soft contour of her neck and cheek.

Had the stranger been saying anything of import Caleb would have missed no syllable. But, through long years of experience with the dreary windiness and empty pothouse eloquence of politicians, the Railroader had learned by instinct, and without waiting to catch so much as the first word, whether anything worth hearing was being said, or if the case were, as he was wont to express it, "an attack of rush-of-words-to-the-mouth." He had already placed his present caller's oration in the latter category. But her pause brought him back to himself.

"Well?" he demanded.

"So I am here to implore you to be just, to be generous," resumed the girl, slightly raising the pitch of the scene as she approached a climax. "I throw myself on your mercy. I, Enid Conover——"

"Enid Conover!" snorted the Railroader. "Why——"

"Yes. Enid Conover! How I have learned to love that name!"

"Have, hey? Then take my advice, young woman, and stifle that same wild adoration for my poetic cognomen, for you aren't going to have the renting of it any longer'n I can help."

"Not——?"

"Oh, you'll get over it easy! Just as you got over your love for that high-sounding title, Enid Montmorency. And just as, before that, when you left your mother's Germantown boarding-house, you got over any passion you may have had for your original name, Emma Higgs. You see I know some little about you. I took the trouble to have you looked up. You and your family. You told Gerald your family's old. From all I hear, I guess the main difference between you and that same family is that one's older'n you make out and the other's younger. Take your choice as to which is which. And now——"

"You insult me!" declaimed the girl, her eyes flashing, her figure drawn to the full height of a really excellent pose, her pompadour nestling protectingly above the arched brow.

"No, I don't. I couldn't. (Jerry, you sit down there and behave yourself or I'll spank you!) If you think I'm wrong, maybe you'd like me to tell my son the way you first happened to go on the stage. No? I guess I've got this thing framed up pretty near straight. It's a grand-stand play, and Papa is It, eh? A masterstroke of surprise for the old man, and a final tableau of the bunch of us clustering about you and Gerald in the centre of the stage, while you fall on each other's necks and do a unison exclamation of 'God-bless-the-dear-old-Dad! How-much-will-he-leave-us? And-how-soon?' You waited in town awhile. But Papa didn't relent and send Hubby back to his lonely wifie. Then you sick Gerald on to acting like a human being, hoping to win Papa over by being a good boy. No go. Then as a last play you butt in here on a sudden with all your lines learned down pat, and do a grand appeal. Well, Mrs.-Miss-Emma-Higgs-Enid-Montmorency-Conover, it doesn't work. That's all. If you've got the sense I think, you'll see the show's a frost, and you'll start back for Broadway. Take my blessing, if you want it, and take Jerry along for good measure, if you like. It's all you'll ever get from me, either of you."

To Caleb Conover's unbounded horror and amaze, Enid, instead of spurning him haughtily, burst into a crescendo, throaty gurgle of contralto weeping, and flung herself bodily upon him; her long-gloved arms twining about his neck, her pompadoured head snuggling into his bosom.

" Oh, Father! *Father!* " came a muffled, yet artistic wail from somewhere in the region of his upper waistcoat buttons. " How *can* you? You've broken Gerald's heart. And now you're breaking mine. Forgive us! "

" Miss Lanier! " thundered Caleb, struggling wildly to escape the snake-like closeness of the embrace, " for heaven's sake won't you come and—and unwind this person? She's spoiling my shirt-front. Lord, how I do hate to be pawed! "

" Do not touch me! Do not *dare* to, menial! " commanded the bride, relinquishing her hold, and glaring like a wounded tigress at Anice, who had made no move whatever in response to Caleb's horrified plea. The visitor drew back from Caleb as though contact with him besmirched her.

"*Well!*" she gasped, and now the throaty contralto was merged into a guttural snarl, ridiculously akin to an angry cat's. "*Well!* Of all the cheap tight-wads I ever struck! Think you can backtrack *me*, do you? Well, you *lose!* I'm married to him all right, and *I'm* not giving him up in a hurry. You try to butt in, and you'll find yourself in a hundred thousand alienation suit! Oh, I know *my* rights, and no up-country Rube's going to skin me out of 'em. You old bunch of grouchiness! And to think they let you boss things in this jay town of yours! Why, in New York you'd never get nearer Broadway than Tenth Avenue, and you couldn't even boss a red light precinct. My Gawd! I'll have to keep it dark about my coming to a hole like this or my friends'll think I've been playing a ten-twenty-thirt' circuit. No civilized person ever comes here, and now I know why. They're afraid they'll be mistook for a friend of yours, most likely. You red-headed old geezer, you don't even know a lady when you see one. Keep your lantern-jawed, pie-faced mutt of a son. I'm going back to where there's at least *one* perfect gentleman who knows how to behave when a lady honors him by——"

"Enid!" cried Gerald, who had sat in dumb, nerveless confusion during the recent interchange of courtesies, "you don't mean—? You mustn't go back to him! You *mustn't!* Has he met you again since I left? Tell me! I said I'd kill him if he ever spoke to you again, and, by God, I will! He shan't——"

A timid, falsetto screech, like that of a very young leveret that is inadvertently trodden beneath a farmer's foot in long grass, broke in on the boy's ravings. Mrs. Caleb Conover collapsed on the floor in a dead faint.

Anice ran to the unconscious woman's aid. Even Gerald, checked midway in his mad appeal, stopped and stared down in stupid wonder at his mother's little huddled figure.

Caleb seized the moment to cross the room quickly toward the furious chorus girl. He caught her by the shoulder, and in his pale eyes blazed a flare that few men and no woman had ever seen there. The color, behind the artistic paint on the visitor's face, went white at the look. She, who was accustomed to brave the rages of drunken rounders, shrank speechless, cowering before those light eyes. One arm she raised awkwardly as if to avert a blow. Yet Caleb's touch on her shoulder was gentle; and, when he spoke, his voice was strangely dead and unemotional. So low was it that his meaning rather than his exact words reached the actress.

"This is *my* city," said he. "What I say goes. There is a train to New York in thirty minutes. If you are in Granite one minute after it leaves, my police shall arrest you. My witnesses shall make the charge something that even *you* will hardly care to stand for. My judge shall send you to prison for a year. And every paper in New York shall print the whole story as I choose to tell it. Now go!"

The fear of death and worse than death was in her eyes. She slunk out, shrunken in aspect to the form of an old and bent woman. Not even—most beloved trick of stage folk!—did she turn at the portières for a parting look. The patter of her scared, running feet sounded irregularly on the marble outer hall. Then the front door slammed, and she was gone.

The final scene between Conover and his son's wife had endured less than twenty seconds. It was over, and she had departed before Gerald realized what had happened. Then, with a cry, he was on his feet and hurrying to the door. But his father stood in front of it.

"If you're not cured now," said Conover, "you never will be. Go back and ring for your mother's maid."

The boy's mouth was open for a wrathful

retort. But embers of the blaze that had transformed Caleb's face as he had dismissed the chorus girl still flickered there. And under their scorching heat Gerald Conover slunk back, beaten but still muttering defiant incoherences under his breath.

Mrs. Conover, under Anice's gentle ministration, was coming to her senses. She opened her eyes with a gasp of fear, then sat up and looked apprehensively around.

"She is gone, dear," whispered Anice, divining her meaning, "and Gerald didn't mean what he said. He was excited, that was all. He's all right again now. Shall I help you upstairs?"

But Mrs. Conover insisted on being assisted to the nearby sofa, from which refuge she feebly waved away her maid and vetoed Anice's further offices.

"I am all right," she pleaded under her breath. "Let me stay here. Caleb hates to have me give way to these heart attacks. I'll stay till he has gone to his study. Then——"

"All right again, old lady?" asked Caleb, walking across to the sofa. "Like me to send for the doctor?"

"No. Yes, I'm quite well again now," stammered his wife. "Thank you for asking."

It was not wholly indifference which had kept Conover from the invalid's side. So great had been the unwonted fury that mastered him, he had dared not speak to either of the women until he was able to some extent to curb it. His usually iron nerves were still a-quiver, and his voice was unlike its customary self.

"Until further notice," he announced dryly, looking from one to the other, "these 'pleasant home hours' are suspended. By request. They're too exciting for a quiet man like me. I hope you'll all try to smother any disappointment you feel. And now," turning to the butler, who had come in answer to his ring, "I'll see if I can't get the taste of this farewell performance of the pleasant hour series out of my mouth before I start my evening's work. Gaines, order Dunderberg brought around in ten minutes."

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Conover, who had imperfectly caught the order.

"To get into my riding clothes," answered her husband from the doorway.

"But you spoke about Dunderberg. You're surely not going to ride Dunderberg when I'm so shaken up. I shall worry so——"

"Why? *You* ain't riding him."

"But why not ride Sultan? He's so gentle and quiet and——"

"Letty! do I look as if I was on a still hunt for something gentle and quiet? I want something that'll give me a fight. Something that'll tire me out and take my mind off black, floppy pompadours and stocking-leg gloves! Jerry, you come along with me. I want a talk with you."

"Oh, if only that dreadful horse would die!" sighed Mrs. Conover. "I never have an instant's peace while you're riding him."

"Rot!" growled Caleb, grinning reassurance at the pathetic little figure on the sofa. "There never yet was a horse I couldn't manage or that could harm *me*. Come along, Jerry."

He stamped upstairs to his dressing-room followed by the reluctant, still muttering Gerald.

This was by no means the first time Mrs. Conover had plucked up courage to entreat her lord not to ride his favorite horse, Dunderberg, the most vicious, tricky brute in all that horse-breeding State. And never yet had the Railroader deigned to heed her request. In fact, such opposition rather pleased him than otherwise, inasmuch as it enhanced, to all listeners, his own equestrian prowess.

Caleb Conover was a notoriously bad rider. Horsemanship must be learned before the age of twenty or never at all. And Conover was well past forty before he threw leg over saddle. But he loved the exercise, and took special joy in buying and mastering the most unmanageable horses he could find.

How so wretched a horseman could avert bad falls or even death was a mystery to all who knew him. It was seemingly by his own sheer will power and brutal strength of mind and body that he remained triumphant over the worst horse; was never thrown nor failed to conquer his mount.

It was one of the sights of Granite to see Caleb Conover careering down the main avenue of the residence district, backing some foaming, plunging hunter, whose wildest efforts could never shake that stiff, indomitable figure from its seat. With walloping elbows and jerking shoulders, the Railroader was wont to thunder his way at top speed up and down suburban byways; inciting his horse to its worst tricks, tempting it to buck, kick, wheel or rear. And when the maddened brute at length indulged in any or all of these manœuvres, a joy of battle would light the rider's face as, with unbreakable knee grip and a self-possession that never deserted him, he flogged the steed into subjection.

In telling Letty that there was no horse he could not safely manage and control Conover had but repeated an oft-made boast—a boast whose truth he had a score of times proven. He was not a constant equestrian. He never rode for the mere pleasure of it. In ordinary moments he cared little for such recreation. But when he was angered, or perplexed, or desired to freshen jaded nerves or brain, his first order was for his newest, worst-tempered horse.

As he rode so semi-occasionally, and as the horse he selected was usually one which even his pluckiest grooms feared to exercise, the brute in question was fairly certain to be in a state of rampant, rank "freshness," and to require the best work of two men to lead him from the stables to the *porte cochère*. As few steeds could long withstand such training as Conover inflicted, he was forever changing mounts. The horse of the hour would wax so tame and docile as to preclude further excitement, or would break a blood-vessel or go dead lame in one of the fierce conflicts with its master. Then a new mount must be sought out.

It was barely a month earlier that Caleb had discovered Dunderberg, and had bought the great black stallion at an outrageously high price. And thus far the purchase still delighted him, for Dunderberg not only showed no signs of cringing to the master's fiery will, but daily grew fiercer and more unmanageable.

So, while Mrs. Conover trembled, wept and alternately prayed and watched the length of driveway beyond her window, the Railroader was wont to dash at breakneck speed along the farther country roads, atop his huge black horse, checking the mad pace only for occasional battles-royal with the ever-fractious beast.

To-night, coming atop the previous excitement of the " pleasant home hour," the strain on Letty was too great. Clinging convulsively to Anice, the poor woman wept with a hysterical abandon that almost frightened the girl. Tenderly, lovingly as a mother the girl soothed the trembling old lady; comforting her as only a woman of great heart and small hand can; quieting at length the shuddering hysterics into half-stifled sobs.

Had Caleb Conover (upstairs wrestling with an overtight riding boot) chanced upon the group, he would have been sore puzzled to recognize in this all-tender, pitying maiden the coldly reserved secretary on whose unruffled composure and steady nerve he had so utterly come to rely.

" Oh, it's horrible—*horrible!* " panted Mrs. Conover, finding voice as the sobs subsided.

"Yes, yes, I know," soothed Anice. "But it——"

"You *don't* know. You can't know. It isn't only the horse. It's everything! I sometimes wonder how I stand it. Each time it seems as if——"

"Don't! Don't, dear! You're overwrought and tired. Let me take you upstairs and——"

"No. It does me good. There's never been anyone I could talk to. And sometimes I've felt I'd give all this abominable money and everything just for one hour's friendship with anyone who really cared."

"But *I* care. Really, *really* I do. Let me help you, won't you, please? I want so much to."

"'Help' me?" echoed the weeping woman, with as near an approach to bitterness as her crushed spirit could muster. "*Help* me? How can anyone help one of Caleb Conover's slaves? And I am the only one of them all who has no hope of escape. The others can leave him and find work somewhere else. Even the horses he loves to fight have the satisfaction of fighting back. But I haven't courage enough to do either of those things. What *can* I do?"

It was the first time in their three years of daily intercourse that Anice Lanier had seen or so much as suspected the existence of this feeble spark of resentment in the older woman's cowed soul. It dumbfounded her, and left her for the time without power of consoling.

"Do you know, Miss Lanier," went on Letty, "at one time I hated you? Yes"—as she noted the pained surprise in the girl's big, tear-swimming eyes—"actually hated you. You were all I was not. You were not afraid of him. He deferred to you. He never deferred to me, or to anyone else but you since he was born. He never cared for me. And he did care for you. If I were to die——"

"Mrs. Conover!"

Anice had shaken off Mrs. Conover's clinging hands, and was on her feet, her eyes dry, her cheeks blazing.

"Don't be angry with me! *Don't!*" whimpered the invalid. "I didn't mean any harm. You said you wanted to help me. And oh, if you only knew what a help it is to be able to speak out for once in my life without fear of that terrible will power of Caleb's choking me silent! I don't hate you now. I didn't as soon as I saw you cared nothing for him. For you don't. I see more than people think. And—I suppose it's wicked of me to even think such things—but when I die it will be good to know Caleb will for once be balked in his wishes; for you'll never marry him. I know that."

"I can't listen to you!" exclaimed Anice. "You are not yourself or you wouldn't talk so. Please——"

"May I come in?"

Both women, with the wondrous art which their sex alone can master, had dropped into conventional attitudes with their backs to the light by the time the intruder's first word was spoken. As Clive Standish passed through the portières into the library, he saw only that its two occupants were seated, one reading, the other crocheting, in polite boredom, each evidently quite willing that their prolonged session of dreary small talk should be interrupted.

"Good evening, Aunt Letty," said Clive, as he stooped over the excited woman and kissed her. "I called to see Mr. Conover on a matter of some importance. The footman was not sure whether he could—or would—see me or not. So, while I was waiting for him to find out, I thought I heard your voice in here and ventured in. Good evening, Miss Lanier. You'll pardon my left hand?"

The right he held behind him, yet in one of the mirrors Anice could see the knuckles were swathed in plaster. The hand he offered, too, was bruised, cut and discolored.

" I—I had a slight accident," he said hastily, noting her glance. " Nothing of importance. I——"

" Mr. Conover has told us of it," answered Anice. " It was splendid of you, Clive! You risked your life to——"

" To get out of a fight that my own folly had brought on. That was all. I'm afraid my tour wasn't exactly a success. In fact, I fear it will go down in Mountain State annals as the colossal failure of the century. So I'm back."

" You've given up?" she asked in quick interest.

" Why? Do you want me to?"

" No."

Her monosyllable told little. Her eyes, which he alone could see, told more. Clive was satisfied.

" I have not given up," he said simply, " and I am not going to."

" Oh, but, Clive," put in his aunt, finding her voice at last after the shock of seeing Standish walk thus boldly into the lion's den. " You'd really better give up the whole silly business. I'm sure Mr. Conover would be so pleased."

" I don't doubt it," replied Standish, smiling grimly at Anice over the old lady's bobbing head, " but I'm afraid it is a pleasure that's at least deferred. The kind that Solomon tells us 'maketh the heart sick.' I'm still in the race. Very much in it."

"But then, why—why have you come here, Clive?" urged Letty nervously. "Mr. Conover and you are such bad friends. I'm sure there'll be an awful scene, just as there was that time four years ago. And I do so hate scenes. After this evening's——"

"I'm afraid there may be a 'scene,' as you call it," admitted Clive, "but it won't be at all on the order of the one four years ago. And I hope it won't be in your presence either, Aunt."

Again his eyes met Anice Lanier's. She nodded ever so slightly, and he knew that when the time should come he could trust her to remove the timid woman from the danger zone.

"Why do you want to see Mr. Conover?" asked Anice, "or is that an impertinent——?"

"Not in the least. I want to come to an understanding with him. Affairs have reached a point where that is necessary."

"An understanding?"

"Yes. As long as he contented himself with ordering his followers to lampoon and vilify myself and the League I made no complaint. It was dirty, but I suppose it was politics. But when he muzzles the press, orders the police and the mayor of the cities to refuse me fair play, and sets thugs to attack me and illegally steals the State conventions, it's time to have it out with him face to face. That is why I am here, and why I shan't leave until I have seen him. I hadn't meant to say all this to you," he added, ashamed of his own heat, "but——"

"Oh, I'm *certain* Mr. Conover won't like it!" moaned his aunt. "I'm quite certain he won't. Now, if you'd only speak tactfully and pleasantly to him——"

"Well," came the Railroader's strident tones from the hall outside, "where is he, then?"

The portières were swished aside with a jerk that set the curtain rings to jingling, and Caleb Conover, in riding dress, hatted, spurred and slashing his crop against one booted leg, filled the narrow doorway.

Mrs. Conover gave a little gasp of fear. Anice Lanier let fall over her bright face the mask of quiet reserve it always wore in her employer's presence.

Clive rose and took a step toward his unwelcoming host.

And so, for ten seconds, the rival candidates faced each other in silence—a silence heavy with promise of storm.

CHAPTER VIII

CALEB CONOVER LISTENS AND ANSWERS

"WELL," began Conover, breaking the short pause, "what do *you* want?"

"I want to speak to you—alone," answered Standish.

"Come up to my study. Gaines, tell the groom to keep Dunderberg moving. I'll be down in ten minutes."

In silence the Railroader led the way upstairs. He passed into the study, leaving Clive to follow. Nor, as he seated himself in his big desk chair, did he request his visitor to sit down. Ignoring these slights, Clive took up his stand on the opposite side of the desk.

"Now, then," said Caleb, "get through your business as quick as you can. What do you want?"

"To speak to you in reference to this campaign."

"Had enough, eh?"

"Altogether too much of the sort you've inflicted on me."

" Good! You've got more sense than I thought. There's two kinds of fools: the kind that put their heads in a hornet's nest once and then have sense enough to admit they've been stung, and the kind that keeps their heads there because they're too daffy to see the exit-signs or too pig-headed to confess that hornet-stings ain't the most diverting form of massage. I'm glad to see you belong to the first class. I'd placed you in the second."

" But I——"

" But you want to get out of this p'ticular hornet's nest, I s'pose, without giving too life-like an imitation of a man shinning down from a tree, eh? Well, I guess that can be fixed. Sit down. We'll——"

" You're mistaken! " broke in Standish, resenting the more civil tone of his host as he had not resented his former rudeness, " I'm in this fight to stay. I——"

" Want your cash losses made good? If you——"

" Mr. Conover," said Clive calmly, though the knuckles that gripped the table-edge were white with pressure, " when your lackey, Shevlin, made that same proposition to me, he thought he was making a perfectly straight offer. And, judging by the standards you've taught him, I suppose the suggestion was almost holy compared with the majority of his tactics. So I didn't thrash him. He knew no better; for the same reason I don't thrash *you.*"

"That and maybe a few others," laughed Conover, in no wise offended. "I climbed up from yard-boy to railroad president by frequently jamming my fists in where they'd do the most good. I guess you'd have a faint s'picion you'd been in a fight before you was through. But I presume you didn't come here to-night to give an encore performance of your grand-stand play at Grafton. It seems I started on the wrong idea just now. You don't want to drop out gracefully or to sell out, and you prefer the soothing attentions of the hornets to——"

"Yes, if you put it that way, Mr. Conover——"

"Hold on a second."

The Railroader crossed to a screen at the farther end of the room. Thrusting it aside he said to a stenographer who sat behind it, pencil and pad in hand:

"We won't need you any longer. This ain't going to be that kind of interview after all. You can go now. Just a little precaution of mine," he added to Clive as he returned to the table. "Now you can go on talking."

"You were setting a spy to take down what I said?" gasped Clive, incredulous.

"No. A stenographer to report our little chat. We were a bit short on campaign litterchoor. But I see it won't be needed now. Go ahead."

"I've just returned from a tour of the State," commenced Standish, once more forcing himself to keep down his temper.

Conover drew a typewritten bundle from a drawer.

"If you were counting on telling me all about it," he observed, "I can save you the trouble. Here's the whole account."

"Does your 'account' include the recital of a mob incited to smash furniture, insult women and attempt murder? Or of suborned town officials, bought policemen and muzzled editors? If not, it is incomplete. I went on that tour prepared to meet all legitimate obstacles. I met only fraud, violence and the creatures of boss-bought conspiracy. It is to call you to account for that and to ask how far it was done by your personal sanction that I have come to see you. Also to ask if you intend to give me fair play in future."

"Fair play?" echoed Conover in genuine bewilderment. "Son, this is politics, not ping pong."

"Everyone in God's world is entitled to fair play. And I'm here to demand it."

"'God's' world, eh? My friend, when you've travelled about it as long as I have, you'll find out that the orginial owner sublet the premises long ago."

"It looks so, in the Mountain State, I agree. But I'm trying to act as local dispossess agent for the present tenant. All men are born equal, and some of us are tired of being owned by a political boss. We——"

"You're a terribly original feller, Standish! That remark, now, about all men being 'born equal.' It was made in the first place, wasn't it, by a white-wigged, short-panted hero who owned more slaves than he could count? 'Born equal!' Maybe all men are. But by the time they're out of swaddling-clothes they've got bravely over it. That old Jefferson proverb's responsible for more anarchy and scraps, and strikes and grumbling and hard-luck stories, than all the whole measly dictionary put together. Get down to business, man. This ain't a p'litical rally. Cut out the fine talk, can't you? My horse is waiting."

"I've told you already what I wish. I want to know if you will fight like a man for the rest of the campaign, and if the out-rages I encountered on my tour were by your order?"

"That won't take an awful lot of eloquence to answer. What was done to you up-State was planned out by me, and it isn't deuce-high to what'll drop on you if you're still alive when the State Convention——"

"You cur!"

"Meaning *me?*" queried Caleb blandly.

"You cur!" repeated Clive, his last remaining shreds of temper thrown to the winds. "I was told I'd meet this sort of reception, but I couldn't believe there was a man alive who had the crass effrontery to confess he was a wholesale crook, and that he was going to continue one. You've sapped the integrity, the honesty, the freedom of this city and State. You've made us a byword for every community in America. You've trailed your iniquitous railroad across the State, crushing every smaller and more honest line, until you are czar of all our traffic. You rob the people by sending to Legislature your own henchmen, who help you steal franchises, and who cut down your taxes and throw the burden of assessment on the very class of people you have already defrauded to the top of your bent. Corruption of the foulest sort has been smeared by you all over the face of this commonwealth, till the people are stricken helpless and speechless under it. Who can help them? Are there ten lawyers in this State who don't wear your collar, and whose annual passes from your road aren't granted them on the written understanding that such courtesies are really 'retainers'? Then, when I try to help the people you have ground to the dirt—when I try to wipe the filthy stain from the Mountain State's shield—even then you will not fight me fair, as man to man. You stab in the back, like any other common felon, and you feel so secure in your own stolen position, that you actually boast of it, and propose to continue your damnable knifing tactics. Why, Caleb Conover, you don't even know how vile a *thing* you are!"

He paused, breathless, still furious. The Railroader was leaning back in his big chair eyeing the angry man with genuine amusement.

"You've got the hang of it!" murmured Caleb, half to himself. "The regular reformer shout. I wouldn't have thought it of you. Honestly, son, it's hard to take you reformers serious. You're all so dead sure you're saying what's never been said before, and that you're discovering what no one else ever dreamed of. If only I could buy one of you Civic Leaguers at my own estimate of you, and sell you at your estimate of yourself, it'd be the biggest deal I ever made. Now don't get red and try to think up new platitudes to beller at me. I've listened pretty patient, but I think it's my turn to do a little shouting, too. I've heard you out. Now, maybe it'll do you no harm to make the same return-play to me. Sit down. You came here to reach an understanding, and get a line on my course, eh? Well, you've got a big load of fine words out of your system in the last few minutes. I'll answer you as best I can, and then maybe in future us two'll understand each other the better."

In spite of himself, Clive Standish listened. This thickset, powerful man, whose blazing temper was proverbial, had attended the young candidate's rather turgid arraignment with every evidence of good-natured interest. He had endured insulting epithet with almost the air of one who hearkens to a compliment. And, in answering, he had spoken so moderately, so at variance with his usual mode of address, that Standish was utterly puzzled, and was half-ashamed of his own vehemence. What one of the Boss's myriad moods was this, and what end had he in view? Clive checked his own impulse to depart. After all, there was something of justice in what Conover had said about the courtesy due a man who had listened to such a tirade as his.

Standish remained standing at the table, looking across with unwilling inquiry at his host, who lounged at ease in his chair, watching the younger man with a grim smile, as though reading his every thought. Their relative positions were ludicrously akin to those of judge and prisoner. And the compelling force that lay behind the amusement in Caleb's light eyes strengthened the resemblance.

" In the first place," said the Railroader, " I think you called me a ' cur.' Twice, I believe, you said that. You most likely thought I'd get mad. A cur *does* get mad when he's called bad names. But a grown man's too busy to kick the puppy that yelps at his heels. A man of sense keeps his mouth shut, unless he's got something to say. If a cur hasn't anything else to yelp at, he goes out and picks a scrap with the moon, or at something else that's too big or too high up to bother to hit back when he barks at it. Me, for instance. So we'll let it go at that, and we won't bother to get up a puzzle picture of us both and label it ' Find the cur.' Have a cigar? No? They aren't campaign smokes. You needn't 'a' been afraid of 'em."

He lighted a gaudily-banded perfecto, puffed it a minute, and went on:

" I don't know why I'm going to waste

time talking to you. I've never took the trouble, before, to defend myself or to try to make other folks see my view of the case. But you're a well-meaning chap, for all you're such an ass. And maybe something's due you after the luck I put you up against on that tour of yours. So I'm just going to squander some words on you. And after that I'll ask you to trot off home, for I've some riding to do."

He shifted his cigar to an angle of his mouth and resumed:

"In the first place, you give me the usual rank old talk about the way I treat the people of the Mountain State. Why do I boss this City and the State? Because the people want me to. Why do I run things to suit myself in my railroads and my legislature? Because the people want me to. Now you're getting ready to say that's a lie. It isn't. Why don't I grab the food off some man's dinner table? Because he *don't* want me to. He'd yell for the police or pull a gun on me if I tried it. Why do I saddle that same man with any taxes I choose? Why do I elect my own crowd to office and work franchises and everything else just as I like? Because he *does* want me to. If he didn't he wouldn't let me. He could stop me from stealing his dinner. And he would. He could stop me from grabbing his State. And he doesn't. Do you s'pose for a second that I, or Tom Platt, or Richard Croker, or Charley Murphy, or Matt Quay or any other boss who ever lived, could have made ten people in the whole world do what those people didn't want to? You knew well enough they couldn't. Then, why did Platt and Quay and the rest boss the Machine? Why do *I* boss the Machine? Because the people *want* to be bossed. Because they'd rather be led than to lead themselves. Can you find a flaw in that? Facts is facts, and history is history. Bosses is bosses, and the people are sheep. Is a shepherd in the herding business for his health and to amuse and el'vate the sheep? Not he. He's in the game for the money he can get out of shearing and occasional butchering. So am I. My own pocket first, last and always. If it wasn't me it'd be another shepherd. And maybe one that'd make the sheep sweat worse'n I do."

Clive's lips parted in protest, but Caleb waved him to silence.

" You were going to say some wise thing about the people's inviolate rights, eh? We've all got ' inviolate rights.' But if we leave 'em laying around loose and don't stand up for 'em, we can't expect much pity when someone else cops 'em away from us. If I try to turn you out of your house, you've got a right to prevent me. And you would. If you sat by and let me do it, you'd deserve what you got. If I try to turn the people out of their rights in the Legislature and they stand for it, who's got a kick coming? Once in a blue moon some man whose brains have all run to lungs—nothing personal—gets up and shouts to the people that they're being conned. Sometimes—not *this* time, mind you—they believe it, and they throw over the Machine and elect a bunch of wall-eyed reformers that know as much about practical politics as a corn-fed dodo bird knows about theology. What happens? The city and the State are run in a way that'd make a schoolboy cry. At the end of one single administration there's a record of incompetence and messed-up official affairs that takes a century to straighten out. The police have been made so pure they won't let ice and milk be sold for sick babies on Sundays, but they haven't time to keep folks from being sandbagged in open daylight. The Building Department Commissioners are so incorruptible they don't know a brick from a lump of putty. And the contractors eat up chunks of overpay for rotten work. And so in every branch of government. The people get wise to all this, and they decide it's better to be bled by professionals and to get at least part of their money's worth in decent service than it is to be bled just as heavy by a pack of measly amachoors and get no service at all. So back they come to the Boss, begging him to get on the job again. Which he does, being a self-sacrificing sort of a cuss, and glad to help the 'plain pe-ople.' Likewise himself."

"The administration you describe is the result of fanaticism, not real reform. It——"

"From where I sit, the difference between the two ain't so great as to show to the undressed eye. You speak of lawyers and country editors being bought by my passes. Is there any law making 'em accept those passes if they don't want 'em? Could I buy ONE of those men if he wasn't for sale? There's just one thing more, and then your little lesson'll be over and you can run home. All through this delightful little ree-union you've kind of took the 'holier-than-thou' tone that's such a pleasing trait of you reformers when you're dealing with mere sane folks. Now, the best thing you can do is to take that fool idea out for a walk and lose it, for you not only ain't any better than me, but ain't half the man, and never *will* be half the man I am. You were born with a gold spoon in your mouth. The spoon was pulled out after you grew up, but not till you had your education and your profession. What did you do? You'd had the best advantages money could buy you. And for all that, the most you could rise to was a measly every-day law practice. That's all the dividends the tens of thousands of dollars invested in your future were ever able to declare, or ever *will* be able to. *I* started life dead broke. No education, no pull, no cash, no prospects. I don't know just how rich I am to-day, but no one's going to call you a liar if you put it at forty millions. And I'm bossing bigger territory—and bossing with more power—than half the so-called high and mighty kings of Yurrup. Now, s'pose *you'd* started where I did? Where'd you be to-day? You'd be the 'honest young brakeman on the branch road,' or at best you'd be 'our genial and rising young feller-townsman,' the second deputy assistant passenger agent of the C. G. & X. That's where *you'd* be. And you know it. Had you the brains or the sand to get where I am? Not you. Any more than one of those patent leather 'ristocrats in France had the genius to win out the Napoleon job. You're where you started. I've kept on rising. And I'll rise to the White House before I'm done. Now I ask you, fair and square, which of us two is the best man, and if you oughtn't to be looking up to Caleb Conover instead of——"

"I am the better man," answered Clive

quietly. " And so is any honest man. And I can look down on you for the same reason any square American can look down on a political Boss. Because we are honest and you are not."

" Well," vouchsafed Caleb, grudgingly, " that's an answer anyhow, and it comes nearer being sense than anything you've said so far. But you're wrong for all that. You talk about honesty. What's honesty? The pious Pilgrim Fathers came here and swindled old Lo, the poor Indian, out of his country in a blamed sight more raw fashion than I've ever bamboozled the people of the Mountain State. And the Mountain Staters were willing, while the Indian wasn't. Yet the old settlers are called ' nation builders ' and ' martyrs,' and a lot of other hot-air titles, and they get statues put up to their memories. How about the Uncle Sam's buying a whole nation of Filipinos and coolly telling 'em: ' *I'm* bossing your islands now. Listen to me while I soften your rebellious hearts with the blessed gospel of the gatling gun.' Yet Uncle Sam's all right. So's John Bull, who done the same trick, only worse, in India and Egypt. No one's going to call America or England or the Pilgrim Fathers dishonest and crooks, is there? Then why do you call Caleb Conover dishonest for doing the same thing, only a lot more squarely and mercifully? The crook of to-day is the hero of to-morrow. And I'm no crook at that. Why, Son, a hundred years from now there's liable to be a statue stuck up somewhere of 'Caleb Conover, Railroader, Champion of the People.' Honesty, eh? What *you* call 'honesty' is just a sort of weak-kneed virtue meaning lack of chance to be something else. 'Honester than me' means 'less chance than me.' The honestest community on earth, according to you reformers' way of thinking, is in the State Penitentiary. For not a crime of any sort's committed there from one year's end to the other."

Conover chuckled softly to himself, then continued:

"And there's something else about me that ought to make 'em sculp a halo onto that same statue. What I've done to build up my pile I've done open and with all the cards on the table. I have called a spade a spade, and I haven't referred to it, vague-like, as an 'industr'l utensil.' I haven't took the Lord in as a silent partner on my deals. What I've took I've took, and I've said, 'Whatcher going to do about it?' I've won out by strength, and I ain't ashamed of my way of playing the game. I haven't talked through my nose about being one of the noble class picked out by Providence to watch over the wealth that poor folks'd have had the good of if I hadn't grabbed it from 'em. And I haven't tried to square myself On High by endowing colleges and heathens and libraries and churches. I guess a sinner's hush-money don't make so much of a hit with the Almighty as these philanthropist geezers seem to think it will. What I've given I've given on the quiet and where it'd keep folks from the poorhouse. When it comes to the final show-down on Judgment Day, I've a sneaking notion the out-and-out pirate—*me*, if you like—will win out by about seven lengths over the holy hypocrite. That's another reason why I tell you you're wrong when you say I ain't honest. I don't hope to convince you by any of the words I've been wasting. If you were the sort of man reason could reach you wouldn't be a reformer. I've squandered enough time on you for one evening. Save all the pat replies that I can see you're bursting with, and spring 'em at your next meeting. I've no time to listen to 'em now. Good night."

Unceremoniously as he had entered the room he quitted it, leaving Standish to go as he would.

"I talked more'n I have since that fool speech of mine at the reception," muttered the Railroader as he clattered down the broad staircase. "But I steered him off from the chance to say what he really wanted to, and I dodged any scene that would be of use to him in his campaign. Too bad he's a Reformer! He's got red blood in him, the young idiot. Yes, and he's not such an idiot either if it comes to that."

Clive Standish, descending the stairs a moment later, puzzled, disappointed, vaguely aware that he had somehow been tricked, heard the shout of a groom and the thundering beat of Dunderberg's flying hoofs along the gravel of the drive.

"If he was as much master of the situation, and as content with himself as he tried to make me think," reflected Clive as he passed out into the darkness, "he'd never ride like that."

Standish went to the League's headquarters, where for two hours he busied himself with routine affairs, and tried to shut out memory of the deep, taunting voice and masterful, amused eyes that had held him captive, and had turned him from the real purpose of his visit. And in time the light, sneering eyes deepened into liquid brown, and the sonorous voice into Anice Lanier's. For whatever theme might form any particular verse of the day's song for Clive, he noticed of late that Anice was certain to be the ever-recurrent refrain.

Wearied with his evening's work, Standish returned late to his own rooms. His man said, as he helped the candidate off with his light covert coat:

" A messenger boy brought a letter for you, sir, about an hour ago. He said there was no answer. I left it on your desk."

Clive picked up the typewritten envelope listlessly and tore it open. It contained a note, also typewritten, and a thicker enclosure. He read:

" *Anonymous letters carry a stigma. Perhaps that is why you did not profit by my last one. I have good reasons for not signing my name. And you have good reason to know by now that what I write is the truth. Be wiser this time. I enclose a list of the County Chairmen who have sold out to Conover, the name of the Chairman to be chosen for next week's State Convention, and a rough draft of the plan to be used for your defeat. Next to each detail you will find my suggestion for blocking it. You owe it to yourself and to the people to take advantage of what I send you.*"

" He's right, whoever he is! " exclaimed Clive, half-aloud. " It's the only way I can fight Conover on equal terms. There's no sense in my standing on a foolish scruple when so much hangs on the result of the Convention."

He snatched up the enclosure which had slipped to the floor. Irresolute he held it for almost a minute, his firm lips twitching, his eyes cloudy with perplexity. Then, with a sigh of self-contempt he slipped note and enclosure in a long envelope, addressed it and rang for his man.

"See that this is delivered to-night," he ordered.

The valet, as he left the room, glanced surreptitiously at the envelope's address. To his infinite bewilderment he saw the superscription:

"*Caleb Conover, Esq.,* 167 *Pompton Avenue. Personal.*"

There was a terrible half hour in the Mausoleum that night.

CHAPTER IX

A CONVENTION AND A REVELATION

The day of the State Convention!

The Convention Hall at Granite was a big barn-like building, frequently used for church and school entertainments, and occasionally giving a temporary home to some struggling theatrical company. For the holding of the convention which was to name the Governor of the Mountain State a feeble attempt at decorating the vast interior had been made by Conover's State chairman.

On the front of the dingy little stage were a table and chairs for the officers, and a series of desks for the reporters of the local and New York newspapers. Across the back hung a ragged drop curtain showing a garden scene in poisonous greens and inflammatory reds. Stuck askew on the proscenium arch were crudely-drawn portraits of Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. Between these alleged likenesses of Democracy's sponsors, Billy Shevlin had, by inspiration and acclaim, caused a huge crayon picture of Caleb Conover himself to be hung.

This monstrous trio of ill-assorted portrait parodies were the first thing that struck the eye as one entered the main door at the front end of the hall. On seeing them, grim old Karl Ansel had cast about him until he located Shevlin and a group of the Railroader's other lieutenants.

" Say, Billy," he drawled in tones that penetrated the farthest corners of the auditorium, " what did you want to show your ignorance of the Scriptures for by hanging Conover's picture in the middle with Jackson and Jefferson on the outside? You've got things reversed. In the original it was the Just Man who hung between two thieves. You ought to have put your mug and Conover's up there with Clive Standish in the centre, if you wanted to carry out the right idea."

And Shevlin, in no wise comprehending, looked for the first time with somewhat less pride on his artistic work, and waxed puzzled at the roar of laughter that swept over the massed delegates.

" Them pictures set the Boss back fifteen dollars apiece," he began, in self-justification, " an'——"

" And like most of the crowd here," finished Ansel, " they were sold to Conover before the convention began."

There was the usual noise and tramping of feet and clamoring of brass bands, the customary rabble of uniformed campaign clubs with their gaudy banners and pompous drum-majors about the hall and in it, for an hour before the time that had been set for the calling of the convention. Here, there and everywhere circulated the busy lieutenants of Boss Conover. Their master, with a little coterie of chosen lieutenants moved early into his headquarters in one of the rooms at the rear of the stage, where he sat like some wise old spider in the heart of his web, sending out warnings, advice and admonitions to his under-strappers.

Although Conover was leaving no ravelled ends loose in his marvellously perfect machine, he took his wonted precautions more through force of habit and for discipline's sake than through any necessity. He felt calmly confident of the result. He had looked upon his work and he had seen that it was good. Even had Standish been the choice of a majority of the people in all eight counties of the State, it would have availed him little, for through the routine tricks whereof the Railroader was past master, his young opponent was at the last able to control the votes of but two counties—Matawan and Wills.

Standish's contesting delegates from the other six counties sat sullen and grim in the gallery. Fraudulent Conover delegates, who had usurped the formers' places by the various ruses so successfully put into action at the caucuses, held the credentials and occupied the seats belonging by rights to the Leaguers on the floor of the Convention Hall. There the Machine delegates smilingly sat and awaited the moment when they should name their Boss as candidate for Governor.

From the seats of the usurpers there went up a merry howl of derision as Standish's two little blocks of delegates from Matawan and Wills marched in and took their places well down in front, where they formed a pitifully small oasis among the Conover delegates from Bowden, Carney, Haldane, Jericho, Sparta and Pompton counties.

There was no cheering by the Standish delegates on the floor of the convention. Nine out of ten knew that it was practically a hopeless fight into which they were about to plunge, and they knew, too, that not one of them would have been given his rightful place as a delegate, had it not been that even Conover feared to outrage sentiment in those ever-turbulent rural counties, as he had done in the larger and more "loyal" sections of the State.

Karl Ansel, with an inscrutable grin on his long, leathery face, might have sat for a picture of a typical poker player, as he slipped into his place at the head of the Wills County delegation. If the shadow of defeat was in his heart, it did not rest upon his lignum vitæ features. What mattered it that his every opponent was smugly aware that the League's cards were deuces? It was Karl's business to wear the look of a man secure behind a pat flush. And he wore it. But at heart he was sore distressed for the hopes of the brave lad he had learned to like so well. And, as he watched the swelling ranks of Conover delegates, his sorrow hardened into white-hot wrath.

Standish was nowhere in sight. Following the ordinary laws of campaign etiquette, he did not show himself before the delegates in advance of the nomination; but, like Conover, sat in temporary headquarters behind the stage. About him were a little knot of Civic Leaguers, some of them men who had run the risk of personal violence in the campaign in their fight to obtain a square deal for the young reformer against the Juggernaut onrush of the Machine. One and all they were Job's comforters, for they knew it would take a miracle now to snatch the nomination from the Railroader's grip.

Promptly at twelve o'clock Shevlin, in his newly acquired capacity of State Chairman, called the convention to order. He had judiciously distributed bunches of his best trained shouters where they would do the most good. This claque, glad to earn their money, kept an eye on their sub-captains and cheered at the slightest provocation. They cheered Shevlin as he brought the gavel down sharply on the oak table in front of him, and went through the customary rigmarole of announcing the purposes of the convention. They cheered when he named the secretaries and assistant secretaries who would act until the permanent organization had been effected. And between times they cheered just for the joy of cheering.

Through the din the little square of Standish delegates from Wills and Matawan sat grim and silent, while the contesting delegates in the gallery above muttered to one another under their breath their yearnings for the opportunity to take personal payment on the bodies of those who had ousted them from their lawful places.

Both sides knew that the first and last test of strength would come upon the selection of the Committee on Credentials, since it was to this committee that the contests of the six larger counties for the right to sit in the convention would go for settlement. By an oversight common to more than one State, there was no clause in the party laws setting forth the procedure to be followed in the selection of the committee of a State convention. At preceding conventions the chairman had invariably (and justly) ruled that only delegates whose seats were not contested should be entitled to a hand in the selection of the Committee on Credentials, for custom holds that to permit delegates whose seats are contested to have a hand in the selection of the committee, would be like allowing men on trial to sit as jurors.

On the observance of this unwritten rule hinged Clive Standish's last and greatest hope. If this precedent were to be followed now, it would, of course, as he had pointed out to the doubting Ansel, result in the selection of a committee by the Standish delegates from Wills and Matawan counties, since in those counties alone there were no contests. This must mean a fair struggle. On it Clive staked his all. Staked it, forgetting the endless resource and foresight of his foe. For Caleb Conover had no quixotic notion of giving his rival any advantage whatever. On the preceding night he had written out his decree. This command Shevlin now hastily read over before acting on it:

"*Announce that the chairman rules there shall be three members of the Committee on Credentials from each county, regardless of that county's voting strength, and that the delegates holding the credentials from each county shall be allowed to choose those committeemen.*"

To the layman such an order may mean little. To the convention it meant everything. Six counties were, officially, for Conover. Two for Standish. Thus eighteen of Caleb's adherents could, and would, vote to ratify the seating of the Railroader's delegates. The opponents of this weird measure could muster a numerical force of but six.

Meanwhile, the preliminary organization of the convention had been effected without much delay. The Standish delegates, knowing the futility of making a fight at this time, had raised merely a perfunctory opposition to the nomination of Bourke as temporary chairman. Through Bourke (by way of Shevlin) Conover now proclaimed his plan of choosing the all-important Committee on Credentials.

Bourke, well drilled, repeated the decision in a droning monotone. Instantly the convention was in the maddest uproar. All semblance of order was lost. Bedlam broke loose. In the gallery the contesting Standish delegates writhed in impotent rage, leaning far over the rail, shaking their fists and howling down insult, curse and threat.

On the floor the delegates from Wills and Matawan were already upon their feet, yelling furious protests, shrieking "Fraud;" "Robbery!" and kindred pleasantries, without trying or hoping to secure recognition from the chair.

Foreseeing the inevitable trend of affairs, the Conover "heelers" and the fraudulent delegates from the six larger counties had been prepared for this. At a signal from Billy Shevlin they burst into a deafening uproar of applause.

The furtive-faced Bourke rapped on the table, but the bang of his heavy gavel was unheard. The Standish delegates would not be quieted, and the Conover crowd did not want to be.

A dozen fist-fights started simultaneously. A 'longshoreman—Conover district captain from one of the "railroad" wards of Granite—wittily spat in the face of a vociferating little farmer from Wills County, and then stepped back with a bellow of laughter at his own powers of repartee. But others understood the gentle art of "retort courteous" almost as well as he. Losing for once his inherited New England calm, Karl Ansel drove his big gnarled fist flush into the grinning face of the dock-rat, and sent him whirling backward amid a splintering of broken seats.

As the 'longshoreman staggered to his feet, wiping the blood from his face, the sergeant-at-arms (foreman of a C. G. & X. section gang), made a rush for Ansel, but prudently held back as the gaunt old man fell on guard and grimly awaited his new opponent's onset.

Ansel, smarting and past all control, ploughed his way down the main aisle, and halting below the stage, shook his clenched fist at Caleb's crayon likeness.

"I've seen forty pictures of Judas Iscariot in my time," he thundered, apostrophizing the portrait in a nasal voice that rose high above the clamor, "and no two of them looked alike. But by the Eternal, they *all* were the living image of YOU!"

Then he went down under an avalanche of Conover rowdies, giving and taking blows as he was borne headlong to the floor. Through the tumult, the pounding of Bourke's gavel upon the table was like the unheeded rat-tat of a telegraph ticker in a tornado. It was fifteen minutes before a semblance of order had been restored. By that time there were on every side a kaleidoscopic vista of bleeding noses, torn clothing, and battered, wrathful faces.

Thus it was that, at the cost of a brief interim of fruitless rioting, the Machine had its way. Over the hopeless protests and bitter denunciations of the tricked minority the empty form of choosing the Committee on Credentials was carried through. As a foreseen result, Standish had but six members on the committee, three from Wills and three from Matawan, while from the Conover faction eighteen were to sit in judgment upon the merits of their own cause.

The contest was over. The Standish delegates offered but a perfunctory opposition to the work of choosing the Committees on Organization and Platform. This much having been done, the convention took the usual recess, leaving the committees to go into session in separate rooms back of the stage.

The delegates filed out, the men from Wills and Matawan angry and silent in their shamed defeat, those from the six victorious counties crowing exuberant glee at their easy triumph.

The adjournment announced, Clive slipped out of the Convention Hall by a rear entrance, and went across to his private office at the League rooms. He wanted to be alone

—away from even the staunchest friends—in this black hour. Against all counsel and experience, against hope itself, he had hoped to the last. His bulldog pluck, his faith in his mission, had upheld him above colder, saner reason. Even the repeated warnings of Ansel had left him unconvinced. Up to the very moment Conover's final successful move was made Standish had hoped. And now hope was dead.

He was beaten. Hopelessly, utterly, starkly beaten. From the outset Conover had played with him and his plans as a giant might play with a child. It had been no question of open battle, with the weaker antagonist battered to earth by the greater strength of his foe. Far worse, the whole campaign had been a futile struggle of an enmeshed captive to break through a web too mighty for his puny efforts, while his conqueror had sat calmly by, awaiting a victory that was as sure as the rise of the sun.

Standish knew that in a few minutes he would be able to pull himself together and face the world as a man should. In the interim, with the hurt animal's instinct, he wanted to be alone.

Save for a clerk in the antechamber, the League's rooms were deserted. Everyone was at the convention. The clerk rose at

Clive's entrance and would have spoken, but the defeated candidate passed unheeding into his own office, closing the door behind him.

Then, stopping short, his back to the closed door, he stared, unbelieving, at someone who rose at his entrance and hurried forward, hands outstretched, to greet him.

" I knew you would come here!' said Anice Lanier. " I *felt* you would, so I hurried over as soon as they adjourned. Aren't you glad to see me?"

He still stared, speechless, dumbfounded. She had caught his unresponsive hands, and was looking up into his tired, hopeless eyes with a wealth of pity and sympathy that broke through the mask of blank misery on his face, and softened the hard lines of mouth and jaw into a shadow of a smile.

" It was good of you to come," he said at last. " I thought I couldn't bear to see anyone just now. But—it's so different with you. I——"

He ceased speaking. His overstrung nerves were battling against a childish longing to bury his hot face in those cool little white hands whose lightest touch so thrilled him, and to tell this gentle, infinitely tender girl all about his sorrows, his broken hopes, his crushed self-esteem. In spirit he could feel her arms about his aching head, drawing it to her breast; could hear her whispered words of soothing and encouragement.

Then, on the moment, the babyish impulse passed and he was himself again, self-controlled, outwardly stolid, realizing as never before that the price of strength is loneliness.

" I am beaten," he went on, " but I think we made as good a fight as we could. Perhaps another time——"

She withdrew her hands from his. Into her big eyes had crept something almost akin to scorn.

" You are giving up? " she asked incredulously. " You will make no further effort to——"

" What more is to be done? The Committee on Credentials——"

" I know. I was there. It's all been a wretched mistake from the very beginning. Oh, *why* were you so foolish about those letters? "

" Letters? What letters? "

" The letters sent you with news of Mr. Conover's plans for——"

" Those anonymous letters I got? What do *you* know——"

" I wrote them," said Anice Lanier.

CHAPTER X

ANICE INTERVENES

"You wrote them? *You* wrote them?" muttered Standish, over and over, stupid, dazed, refusing to believe, to understand.

"Yes," she said, "I wrote them. And I wrote one to Mr. Ansel. He was wiser than you. He tried to profit by what I——"

"And I—*I* thought it might be Gerald Conover."

"Gerald? He never knew any of the more secret details of the campaign. His father couldn't trust him."

"And he *did* trust *you*."

Clive had not meant to say it. He was sorry before the words had passed his lips. Yet it was the first lucid thought that came to him as his mind cleared from the first shock of Anice's revelation. He knew how fully Conover believed in this pretty secretary of his; how wholly the Railroader had, in her case, departed from his life rule of universal suspicion. That she should thus, coldbloodedly, calculatingly, have betrayed the trust of even such an employer as Caleb was monstrous. He could not reconcile it with anything in his own long knowledge of her. The revelation turned him sick.

"You despise me, don't you?" she asked. There was no shame, no faltering in her clear young voice.

"I have no right to—to judge anyone," he stammered. "I——"

"You despise me." And now it was a statement, not a query.

"No," he said, slowly, trying to gauge his own tangled emotions, "I don't. I don't know why I don't, but I don't. I should think anyone else that did such a thing was lower than the beasts. But you—why, *you* are yourself. And the queen can do no wrong. I've known you nearly all your life. If it had been possible for you to harbor a mean or dishonest impulse I'd have been the first person on earth to guess it. Because no one else would have cared as I did. As I *do*. I don't understand it at all. And just at first it bowled me over, and a whole rush of disloyal thoughts and doubts came over me. But I know now it's all right, somehow, for it's *you*."

"You mean," exclaimed the girl, wonderingly, "that after what I've told you, you trust me?"

"Why, of course."

"And you don't even ask me to explain?"

"If there was anything I had a right to know—that you wanted me to know—you'd have explained of your own accord."

She looked at him long, searchingly. Her face was as inscrutable as the Sphinx's, yet when she spoke it was of a totally different theme.

"What are you going to do?" she inquired.

"Do?" he repeated, perplexed.

"Yes, about the campaign."

"There's nothing to do. I am beaten. When the convention meets, in half an hour, Conover will be nominated. Only my two little blocks of delegates will be left to oppose him, against all that whole——"

"Yes; yes, I know that," she interposed, "but what then?"

"That is the end, I suppose. Perhaps by the next gubernatorial campaign——"

"The next? *This* campaign hasn't fairly begun yet. Do you mean to say you are going to sit by with folded hands and accept defeat?"

"What else is left?"

"Everything is left. You have tried to fight an all-powerful machine, to fight it on its own ground, along its own lines, yet refusing to use its own weapons or to guard against them. And you have failed. The *real* fight begins now."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you must call on the people at large to help you. You have aroused them. Already there is so much discontent against Boss rule that Mr. Conover is troubled. You have no right to abandon the Cause now that you've interested others in it. Put yourself in the people's hands."

"You mean, to——?"

"To declare yourself an independent candidate."

"'Bolt' the Democratic ticket? It——"

"It is against custom, but good men have done it. In this battle, as I understand it, there is no question of party issues. It is the people against the Machine. Can't you see?"

"Yes," he replied, after a moment of hesitation, "I see. And you are right. But it means only the courting of further defeat. What Conover has already done in muzzling the press and using other crooked tactics, he will continue to do. My speeches won't be allowed to circulate. My meetings will be broken up. More Conover men will register than can be found on the census list. And on Election Day there will be the usual ballot frauds. All the voting machinery is in Conover's hands. Even if I won I would be counted out at the polls. No——"

"Wait! If I can clear the way for you, if I can insure you a fair chance, if I can prevent any frauds and force Mr. Conover to leave the issue honestly to the people of the Mountain State—if I can do all this, *then* will you declare yourself an independent candidate, and——?"

"But how can *you*—a girl—do all this?"

"I'll explain that to you afterwards. But it won't be in any unfair or underhand way. You said just now you trusted me. Can't you trust me in this, too?"

"You know I can."

"And you'll do as I ask?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

"It's worth trial. I'll do it."

"Then I shall be the first to congratulate the future Governor."

"Anice!"—the old-time boyish impetuosity she so well remembered flashing into one of its rare recurrences—"if I win this fight—if I am elected Governor—I shall have something worth while at last to offer you. If I come to you the day I am elected——"

"I shall congratulate you only as I would any other friend."

His lips tightened as at a blow. For a moment neither spoke. It was Clive who broke the silence.

"I have said it awkwardly," he began. "If it had been less to me I might have found more eloquence. I love you. I think I have always loved you. You know that. A woman always knows. I love you. I loved you in the old days, when I was too poor to have the right to speak. What little I am—what little I may have achieved—is for *you.* I have not made much of myself. But that I've made anything at all is due to you. In everything I have done, your eyes and your smile have been before me. At heart, I've laid every success at your feet. At heart I've asked your faith and your pardon for each of my failures. And, whether you care or not, it will always be the same. That one dear ambition will spur me on to make the very best of myself. My victories shall be your victories whether you wish it or not. Perhaps that seems to you presumptuous or foolish?"

"No."

There was no perceptible emotion in the half-whispered word. From it Clive could glean nothing. Presently he went on:

"I think whenever you see a man trying to make the most of all that is in him, and wearing out his very soul in this breakneck American race for livelihood, you'll find there is some woman behind it all. It is for her, not for his own selfish ambition, that he is fighting. Sometimes she crowns his victory. Sometimes he wins only the thorn-crown. But the glory of the work and the winning are hers. Not his. Now you know why I entered this Governorship fight, and why I am willing to keep it up. Oh, sweetheart, I *love* you so. You *must* understand, now, why I longed to come to you in my hour of triumph and——"

"You would have come too late," she said in that same enigmatic undertone.

"*Anice.*"

There was a world of pain in his appeal, yet she disregarded it; and, with face averted, hurried on:

"Would you care for—for the love of a girl who made you wait until you could buy her with fame and an income? Do *I* care for the love of a man who holds that love so cheaply he must accompany its gift with a Governorship title——?"

"And now," she observed, some minutes later, as she strove to rearrange her tumbled crown of rust-colored hair before the tiny patch of office mirror, "and now, if you can be sensible for just a little while, we'll go back to the convention. And I'll explain to you about those letters. The anonymous ones."

"It's all right. I don't have to be told. I——"

"But I have to tell you. That's the worst of being a girl."

The crowd had trooped back into the Convention Hall. Gerald Conover had not been at the earlier session, but now, his sallow face flushed with liquor, he sat silent and dull-eyed among a party of noisy young satellites, in one of the dingy, chicken-coop boxes at the side of the stage.

He had evidently been drinking hard. In fact, since his wife's visit to Granite, the previous week, the youngster had seldom if ever been wholly sober. Nor was his habitual apathy all due to drink.

The Conover machine, having greased the wheels and oiled the cogs, did not propose to lose any time in running its Juggernaut over the young reformer who had dared to brave an entrenched and ruthless organization. Amid a hullabaloo Bourke called the conference to order, ending his formula with the equally perfunctory request:

"All gents kindly r'frain from smokin'!"

At the word a hundred matches were struck, in scattered volley, from all corners of the place. For nothing else so inflames the desire to smoke as does its unenforceable prohibition. Thus, amid clouds of malodorous campaign tobacco smoke, was the sacrifice to the Machine consummated.

The Committee on Resolutions offered a perfunctory platform filled with the customary hackneyed phrases, lauding the deeds of Democracy and denouncing the Republican party. As the Republicans had never won a victory in the Mountain State since 1864, these platitudes were provocative of vast yawns and of shuffling of feet as the delegates impatiently awaited the call to the slaughter.

The six Standish men on the Platform Committee had prepared a minority report, but on the advice of Ansel they did not present it.

The Committee on Organization, by a vote of eighteen to six, offered a report nominating Bourke, temporary chairman, to succeed himself as permanent chairman.

Then, while the Conover claque hooted joyously and the Standish men sat by in helpless silence, the finishing stroke was delivered.

Two reports were offered from the Committee on Credentials, one of the minority, signed by the six members from Wills and Matawan, recommending the seating of the contesting Standish delegates from the other six counties; the other, signed by the eighteen Conover members of the committee, recommending that the delegates holding credentials be allowed to retain their seats.

The majority report was jammed through, while Shevlin's noble army of brazen-lunged shouters cheered, screeched and blew tin horns.

In his den behind the stage Caleb Conover's mouth corners twisted in a grim smile of satisfaction as the babel of noise reached him. From some mysterious source Shevlin had produced a half-dozen bottles of champagne, and there, in the room of the successful candidate, corks were drawn and success was pledged to "the Mountain State's next and greatest Governor," with Caleb's time-honored slogan, "To hell with reform!" as a rider.

In another room, directly across the stage, a very different scene was in action. Karl Ansel had left his seat in the Wills County delegation, turning over the floor leadership of the forlorn Standish hope to Judge Shelp, of Matawan; and had gone direct to Standish's quarters. The room had been empty when he entered, but before he had waited thirty seconds, the door was flung open and Clive hurried in.

Ansel looked sharply at him. Then in astonished bewilderment. He had expected to find the beaten man dejected, bereft of even his customary strong calm. On the contrary, Standish, his face alive with resolve and with some other impulse that baffled even Ansel's shrewd observation, came into the place like a whirlwind. Kicking aside the litter of dusty stage properties and dingy, discolored hangings that were piled near the door, he made his way to Karl and grasped his hand.

"How goes it?" he asked. "I'm sorry to be late. I thought——"

"Well, Boy, it's all up," said Ansel. "Some fool said once that virtue was its own reward, and I guess it just naturally has to be. It never gets any other. In half an hour from now Caleb Conover will be nominated for Governor, and we will be bowing our necks for his collar, and pledging ourselves to support him and his dirty gang, just as we always have in the past and just as we always will in the future, I presume. We put up a good fight and an honest one, but you see where it's landed us. So far as we are concerned, it's all over but the shouting."

And the grim old New Englander dropped his hand upon the shoulder of the defeated candidate with an awkward gesture that was half a caress.

" You're mistaken," retorted Clive, " the shouting has just begun. Ansel, I have made up my mind. A man owes more to his State than he owes to his party. Political regularity is one thing, and common decency is another. I marched into this convention a free man, with nobody's collar on my neck, and I'm going to march out in the same way."

" What? " almost shouted Ansel. " You're not going to bolt? "

" Yes, I am," answered Standish. " And I'm going to bolt right now before the nomination is made."

" But, man," protested Ansel, " think of it—the irregularity of it! You'll be branded as a bolter and a renegade, and a traitor and a lot of other things. Why, man alive, it'll *never* do."

" It *will* do," responded Standish. " I have it all planned. If we walk out of this convention now, we are going to take some of the delegates with us. I believe that the Independents will indorse us, and I believe that the Republicans will indorse us; if we take this stand. I believe that there are thousands of Democrats who think more of the State than they do of any one man or any one party. They have followed Conover because there was no one else to follow. Yes, *I'm* going to bolt, and I'm going out there now and tell these people why I do it."

"But look here, Standish," remonstrated Ansel, "that's mighty near as irregular as the bolting itself, going out there and making a speech. No candidate's ever supposed to show his face to the convention until after the nomination is made. You know that, don't you? Then, after the nomination he comes out either to accept it or to promise his support to the winner. You'll bust the party traditions all to flinders."

"Very well," assented Clive, "if I can smash the Machine, too, it's all I ask. I tell you my mind is made up. This convention has been a mockery, a farce. You know how many voters were with us, and you know the deal our delegates got. The time's come in this State to draw up a new Declaration of Independence. And, right now, I'm going to be the man to start the ball rolling."

"But, hold on!" began Ansel. Clive did not hear. Brushing past the lank manager, he walked out of the room and made his way to the front of the platform. Karl, muttering perplexedly, followed him.

As the young candidate's tall figure emerged from the wings, a buzz of wonder went up from the delegates on the floor below, for, as Ansel had said, such an advent at such a time was without precedent. But there was neither hisses from the Conover crowd nor cheers from the corner where the survivors of the Standish hope sat. The delegates were too astonished to make any demonstration.

Straight across the stage Standish strode. Shevlin, hurrying out from Conover's room, made as though to bar his way, but gave place before the other's greater bulk, and fled to tell the Railroader what was afoot.

With Ansel still behind him, Standish kept on until he reached the table beside which the chairman sat. At his coming Bourke jumped nervously to his feet.

" Hey! This ain't regular," he began, unconsciously copying Ansel's words. " The nomination's just goin' to begin, and we——"

But he could get no further. Standish pushed him aside, ignoring the chairman as completely as if he were one of the battered stage properties.

Dropping one hand upon the table, he faced the crowd, his whole being alert with tense nervous force. A low murmur, like a ground swell, ran from row to row of seats, and found its echo in the galleries, where hundreds of the townspeople had packed themselves to hear the nominating speeches, and to witness, with varying emotions, the crowning victory of Caleb Conover.

In the midst of a silence in which the fall of the proverbial pin would have sounded like the early morning milk wagon, Clive Standish began the most unusual speech that a Mountain State convention had ever heard.

" My friends——"

From Shevlin's rooters came a volley of hisses and cat-calls, but the disturbance and the disturbers were speedily squelched. From the galleries and from the back of the stage, where many prominent townsfolk sat, there sprang up a roll of protest, so menacing in its tone, that the half-drunken thugs' cheer-leaders deemed it the better part of valor to draw into their shells and remain thereafter mute.

" My friends," repeated Standish, his powerful voice echoing from floor to roof, " Abraham Lincoln freed the black men forty odd years ago. It's time that somebody freed the white brother. For years this State has groaned under the tribute of a relentless Machine, under the rule of a railroad that was all stomach and no conscience, all bowels and no heart, all greed and no generosity. Our party—and with shame I say it—has been turned into a vest-pocket asset of this vile corporation. For months past, and more especially to-day, you have seen what its power is, as opposed to the power of the more honest citizens of our party. It won to-day, it won yesterday, and it won the day before. It always has won. It rests with us here to-day, now and in this hour, to decide whether a new Proclamation of Emancipation is to be issued or whether the great Democratic party in the Mountain State shall continue to be the chattel, the credulous, simple, weak-kneed, backboneless, hopeless, helpless victim of the greediest, most corrupt railroad that ever trailed its steel shackles across the face of the earth. Whether or not the Boss-guided Machine shall beat us to earth and hold us there forever. We have tried reforming the party from the inside, and we have failed. Has the time come to reform it from the outside?"

He paused, and the answer came. From the Conover hosts went up a shout of "No! No!" mingled with hiss and groan. But instantly, from a great scattered mass of the audience, and from the Standish delegates on the floor, there arose an outburst of cheering that drowned the barking negatives of what had been but ten short minutes before a majority of that convention.

The effect of this outburst was diverse on its hearers. With Standish himself it acted as a tonic, as an electric battery which gave him added force and vigor for what he had yet to say. Karl Ansel it seemed for the moment to stupify and paralyze. Conover's lieutenants it threw into a state of consternation, which approached frenzy, panic, demoralization. They ran aimlessly to and fro, conferring excitedly in hoarse whispers.

Conover, alone, from his den at the rear of the stage, smiled to himself and gave no other sign of interest.

Standish was speaking again, and now behind him stood Karl Ansel recovering from his amazement, and intent to catch his leader's every word.

"I tell you," thundered Clive, beside himself with excitement, "we have got to act—and to act *now*. I tell you that the people of this State, irrespective of party, are waiting for half a chance to throw off the yoke of the railroad—of the Machine. All over this country of ours bosses are being overthrown. They are going down to ruin in the wreckage of their own Machines; and it is the PEOPLE who are downing them. The day of Bossism is passing—passing forever. We came into this convention as free men. *Some* of us did. And I for one propose to walk out of it a free man. If we go before the people of this State on the issue of honest government as opposed to dishonesty, I tell you that we will *win.* It only needs a man with a match, and the nerve to use that match, to start a conflagration that will burn party ties to cinders and leave a free, emancipated people.

"Let them call me bolter, if they will! Let them call me traitor, ingrate, renegade! I would rather be a bolter than a thief. I would rather rip my party, dearly as I love it, to rags and tatters, than to sacrifice my own self-respect any longer! I would rather see the Democratic party pass from existence altogether than to see it continue the tool and the creature of greed and dishonesty.

"Yes, they may call me bolter, and properly so, for I am going to bolt this convention! Is there a man who will follow me out of doors? Out of the filthy atmosphere of this Machine-ridden, Boss-owned convention, into the pure sunshine of God's own people?"

In the midst of an indescribable tumult, in which hisses and cheers were madly intermingled, Clive Standish leaped off the platform, cleared the orchestra railing and strode up the middle aisle toward the open door at the far end of the hall.

And then a strange thing occurred. Karl Ansel, as a man wakened from a dream, rubbed his eyes, and peered for a moment at Clive's retreating back. Then with a yell that shook the rafters he, too, bounded over the rail and hastened up the aisle behind his leader.

The delegates from Wills and Matawan counties arose as one man, forming in procession behind Ansel and Standish.

Down the steps from the gallery came not one, nor a dozen, but nine-tenths of those who had heard the speech, including the very cream of the representative business element of Granite.

The remarkable scene was over in almost less than it takes to tell of it. In a daze sat the abandoned convention. Glancing about them, even the Conover delegates on the floor discovered here and there vacant chairs, gaps in their own solid ranks, where some one, weaker perhaps than the others—or perhaps stronger—had been moved by the furious oratory of Clive Standish to join that procession which even now was rolling out of the front door into the quiet, gaslit street like a living avalanche.

Bourke managed to pull the remnants of

the convention back into some sort of shape. The delegates went through the form of nominating Conover. A quantity of hand-made enthusiasm burst forth; and then, without a speech from the successful nominee, the great occasion wound up in a roar of cheers, shouts and blaring music.

"There wasn't any stereopticon stunts done while I was out of the room, was there?" asked Billy Shevlin as, at the close of the proceedings, he and Bourke repaired to Conover's den behind the stage.

"'Course not," answered the chairman. "Why?"

"Oh, nothin'," said Billy, "only I heard one of them N' York reporters sayin' something about 'handwritin' on the wall.' Maybe it's a new joke that ain't reached Granite yet."

"No," remarked the Railroader, as he joined his lieutenants, "it hasn't reached Granite, and what's more it ain't going to. The only handwriting on these walls will take the form of a double cross. And it'll be opposite Standish's name."

CHAPTER XI

CALEB CONOVER MAKES TERMS

" WELL," remarked Caleb Conover, Railroader, with a Gargantuan sigh of relief as he flung himself into the great desk chair in his study, and lighted one of his eternal black cigars, " *that's* over! "

" It sure is! " chuckled Billy Shevlin, who, alone of the cheering throng that had escorted the gubernatorial nominee home from the convention, had been permitted to enter the sanctum. " But, Boss, I wisht that Standish feller hadn't stampeded the herd like he did. It'll cut holes in your ' landslide ' scheme."

" What can the crank do? " grinned Caleb. " Not a paper in Granite'll report his speech. And we'll work the same game up-State we did during his tour. If worst comes to worst, there's always a quiet, orderly way of losing sight of him at the polls. No, son, Standish's yawps don't bother me any more. I've got him about where I want him, I guess. Here's the cash for the rooters. And here's something for the boys to-night, too. Whoop it up all you like, so long as you keep on the other side of the railroad tracks. That'll be all. Come around by eight to-morrow. And say, Billy!" he called after his departing henchman, "see if you can find Miss Lanier downstairs anywhere. I want to speak to her."

The Railroader leaned farther back in the depths of the soft chair, drawing in great draughts of strong tobacco-reek and expelling it in duplex clouds through his thick nostrils.

It was good to rest. As far as his iron frame and cold nerves could feel such a weakness, reaction from the long strain of the day was upon him. In Conover's case it took the form of lazy comfort; of enjoyment in his rank cigar, in the sensuous delight of relaxing every tense muscle and of sprawling idly, happily before his coal fire. The grim lines of the mouth relaxed, the keen eyes took on a pleasanter light.

He had fought. He had won. He would continue to win. For him the joy of fighting lay more in the battle itself than in the victory. But in the pause between two conflicts it was good to stretch one's self out in a great, comfortable chair, to smoke, to blink drowsily into the red coals. The one thing remaining to complete his sense of utter well-being was the presence of some congenial soul wherewith to talk over his achievement. And——

Anice Lanier's knock sounded at the door. Caleb's placid expression deepened into a smile of real pleasure.

"Come in!" he called. "I was just hoping you'd——"

He checked himself. Across the threshold stepped Anice. She wore a hat and was dressed for the street. Over her shoulder Caleb caught sight of Clive Standish.

"Here's all sorts of unexpected honors!" exclaimed the Railroader. "I heard you'd bolted, Standish, but I never thought you'd bolt so far as this poor shanty of mine. Come in and sit down. We'll make a real merry family party, us three."

There was something peculiarly happy in this advent of the defeated man to swell the victor's triumph. Caleb vaguely felt this. He was glad Anice should see Clive and himself together; should be able to observe his own reserved strength as opposed to the bombastic denunciation Standish had doubtless come to deliver. It would amuse her to note the contrast between the two; to see her employer's superiority in self-control and repartee.

So, as Standish followed the girl into the room, the host actually beamed on his intended victim. Then he noticed that neither Anice nor her escort sat down. Also that the latter remained near the door, while Miss Lanier advanced toward the desk chair Caleb had drawn so snugly into the hearth-angle. But she ignored a second and even softer chair he had arranged on the opposite side of the fire. And all this dimly troubled Caleb Conover.

"Anything the matter?" he asked, with somewhat less assurance. "Come to propose a compromise, Standish? Or maybe a campaign partnership? Good idea, that! Only I'm afraid it wouldn't work this time. In business partnership, you know, one man puts up the money and the other the experience. And by the end of sixty days they've usually swapped. But in politics one man always has both the experience and the money. Or the means of getting 'em. Otherwise he wouldn't be there at all. So I'm afraid I'll have to refuse."

He ended with a laugh that did not carry conviction, even to himself. No one replied. Neither of his guests' faces showed sign of having heard. Conover's good temper wavered.

"What's up?" he demanded of Clive. "Speak out, can't you?"

But it was Anice Lanier who replied.

"Mr. Conover," she said, "you recollect the unsigned letter, enclosing some of your campaign plans, that was sent back to you by Mr. Standish last week?"

Caleb's red hair bristled.

"Yes," he answered, deep in his throat. "Have you found out who sent it?"

"I have," she returned, in the same level voice. "Also the sender of two other letters of the sort, earlier in the campaign. One of these was to Mr. Standish. It contained a description of your plan for the county caucuses and of the measures you had framed against his up-State tour. Mr. Standish destroyed that letter and refused to act on its suggestion."

"More fool he. Who wrote it?"

"The second letter was to Mr. Ansel," went on Anice. "It gave him the idea for scattering issues of an out-of-State paper along the speech-route, with advertisements and report of——"

"Who wrote it, I asked you?"

"The same person wrote all three."

"Then who——"

"I did."

"This isn't a thing to joke about. There's a leak somewhere pretty high up, and I must find——"

"I wrote them."

She spoke slowly, as though imparting a lesson. The Railroader's eyes searched her face one instant. Then he dropped back, heavy and inert, into the farthest recess of his chair.

"Good Lord!" he whispered, staring at her blankly.

"I wrote them," reiterated Anice. "No one knew, not even Mr. Standish, until to-day. I brought him here this evening, because something that is to be said must be said in his hearing. I have his promise not to interfere in this interview, but to let me take my own course. It was I, too, at whose advice he bolted the ticket at——"

"*You've* done all this?" blurted Caleb, finding his shattered self-poise at last. "Are you crazy, girl?"

"No; I am quite sane. From the start I have helped Mr. Standish. By my help, I believe, he will win the Governorship. I have learned much from you, in practical politics, Mr. Conover. I intend to put some of that education into use. You see——"

"You've backtracked me? *You*, of all the folks alive! Why, I'd 'a' gambled my whole pile on your whiteness, girl. This is a measly joke of some kind. It's——"

"It's the truth, Mr. Conover."

And Caleb, looking deep into her eyes,

could at last doubt no longer. A dull red crept into his face.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said, slow, measured of voice, rigid of body. "Jockeyed by the one person in the world I ever had any trust in! Cleaned out like any drunken sailor in a dance hall! Say," he added in puzzled querulousness, "what'd the Almighty mean by putting eyes like yours in the face of a——"

A sudden forward movement from Standish checked him, and, incidentally, drove from his brain the last mists of bewilderment. The Railroader settled forward in his chair, his teeth meeting in the stump of the cigar he had so contentedly lighted but a few minutes before. He was himself again; arrogant, masterful, vibrant with quick resource. A sardonic smile creased his wooden face.

"You're a noble work of God, Miss Lanier, ain't you?" he sneered. "In Bible days the man who betrayed his Master was made the star villain for all time. But when it's a woman that does the betraying, I guess even the Bible would have to go shy on words blazing enough to show her up. For three years," he went on, as Anice, by a quick gesture, silenced Clive's fierce interruption—"for three years and more you've eaten my bread and lived on my money. For three years I've treated you like you were a queen. Whatever I've done or been to other folks, to *you* I've been as white as any man could be. You've had everything from me and mine. And you pay me by playing the petticoat-Judas. Look here, there's something behind all this! Tell me what it means."

"It means," answered Anice, who had borne without wincing the hot lash of the angry man's scorn—"it means that I have tried to pay a debt. Part I have paid. Part I am paying."

"A debt? What rot are you trying to talk? I——"

"If you care to listen I'll tell you. I will make it as short as I can. Shall I go on?"

Conover nodded assent as a man in a dream.

"My father," began Anice, speaking dispassionately, her rich voice flattened to a quiet monotone—"my father was Foster Lanier. You never knew him. You never knew many of the men you have wrecked. But he was chief stockholder in the Oakland-Rodney Railroad. He was not a business man. The stock was left him by his father. It was all we had to live on. It was enough. You owned the C. G. & X. Little by little you bought up the other Mountain State roads. At last you came to the Oakland-Rodney. Do you remember?"

"I remember my lawyer told me there was some stiff-necked old fossil who owned the majority stock and wouldn't sell."

"So you crushed him," went on Anice, unmoved, "as you have crushed others. You cut off the road's connecting points and severed its communication with your own and your allied lines. After isolating it you lowered your own freight rates and mileage until all the Oakland-Rodney patronage was gone. The road collapsed, and you bought it in. My father was a pauper. Other men have been driven to the same straits by you—men whose very names you did not take the trouble to learn. My father knew little of business. To save others who had bought Oakland-Rodney stock at his advice, he sold what little property he had and bought their worthless stock back at par. He was ruined and above his head in debt. My mother was an invalid. The doctors said a trip to the Mediterranean might save her life. We had not a dollar. So she died. My father—he was out of his mind from grief and from financial worry—my father shot himself. It was hushed up by our friends, and he was reported accidentally killed while hunting. It was only one of the countless victories you 'financiers' are so proud of. He and my mother were but two of the numberless victims each of those victories entails.''

She paused. Caleb made no reply. He sat looking in front of him into the pulsing heart of the fire. He had scarce heard her. His mind was occupied to bursting by the shock and acute pain of this rupturing of his last intimate bond with humanity.

"I was left to make my own way,'' continued Anice, "and I came here. Out of one hundred applicants you accepted me. It was not mere coincidence. I believe it was something more. Something higher. I entered your service that I might some day pay the debt I owed my father, who was not strong enough to bear your 'victory,' and my mother, whose life the money you wrested from us might have saved. This is melodramatic, of course. But I think most things in real life are. I came here. I worked for you. I won your confidence, your respect, your trust. Perhaps you think it was a pleasant task I had set myself? I am not trying to justify it. If it was unworthy, I have paid. You say I've 'eaten your bread and lived on your money.' I have. And I have received your confidence. But have I ever eaten a mouthful or received one penny that I did not earn three times over? You yourself have said again and again that I was worth to you ten times what you paid me. You have begged me to let you raise my salary, to accept presents from you. Have I ever consented? If there is a money balance between us, the debit is all on your side. I owe you nothing for what confidences you have lavished on me. Have I ever asked for them or lured you into bestowing them? Have not all such confidences come unsought, even repelled, by me? Have I ever spoken to you with more than ordinary civility? Have I ever so much as voluntarily shaken your hand? The Judas parallel does not hold good, Mr. Conover."

She waited again for a reply. But none came. Conover merely shifted his heavy gaze from the fire to her pale, drawn face.

"In all these years," said Anice, "I have waited my chance. I could not take your life to atone for the two gentle lives you crushed out. Nor would a life like yours have paid one-hundredth of the debt. So I have waited until your life-happiness, your whole future, should be bound up in some one great aspiration. Until you should stake all on one card. When such a time should come I resolved I would make you taste the bitter shame and despair you have made others groan under. Oh, it was long, weary waiting, but I think the end is coming. It *has* come."

"You talk fine, Miss Lanier," observed Caleb, all master of himself once more, "but talking's never quoted at par, except in a poker game and a wedding ceremony. You've been reading novels, and you've framed up a dandy line of story book ree-venge. It's as good as any stage villainess could have thought of. But, honest, it clean surprises me how a woman with all your brains could have took such a fool plan seriously. It's a grand stunt to grab the centre of the stage and drive the wicked oppressor out into the snow. Only it don't happen to be snowing to-night. Neither really nor fig'ratively. No, no, Miss Lanier, your hand's a four flush, and I hold a whole bunch of aces. Go ahead with your little fireworks, if that's your diversion. It won't bother anyone. Certainly not *me*. The only regret I've got in the whole business is finding you've so little horse sense."

"If I had so little," answered Anice calmly, "the affair would have to end here and now. As it is——"

"Well?"

"It's going on."

"Oh, you've extra cards to turn that four flush into a win, eh? Show 'em out. I call."

"If you put it that way. I'm told it only needs one card to convert a 'four-flush' into a good hand. Perhaps I can play that card later. Perhaps you won't oblige me to play it at all. I hope you won't."

"Go ahead."

"I have not been, unwillingly, in your confidence all these years for nothing."

Caleb whistled.

"I'm on!" said he curtly. "If I don't stand aside and let your little friend Standish win the race, you'll do some exposing? Sort of like the girl who showed up John D. in a magazine? Well, fire away. In the first place, I'm not John D., and the American public (outside the Mountain State) ain't laying awake nights to find out how Caleb Conover got his. And if you mean to use 'Confessions of a Secretary' for a campaign document this fall, you're welcome to. I'll take my chance on getting a little more mud than usual slung at me. It won't affect the election, and you know it won't. And you ought to know by this time how little I care what folks think of my character. No, it won't do, Miss Lanier. If that's the card you're counting on using to change your four-flush into a winning hand——"

"You are mistaken. This time, Mr. Conover, it is *I* who am surprised at *your* lack of perception. The ' card ' I spoke of is the Denzlow corespondence."

" The Denzlow—? I burned that a year ago—burned it in this very room. In this fireplace. You were here and saw me. And Denzlow died last May. I'm afraid your ' card ' won't help that poor, lonely four-flush hand of yours after all. I'm sorry, but——"

"You burned a package of letters wrapped in a sheet indorsed ' Denzlow,' " interposed Anice, " but they happened to be a sheaf of insurance circulars. With Mr. Denzlow's permission (and on my promise not to make use of them while he was alive) I bought those letters at the time you thought *you* bought them back from him. He got extra money, and the letters were supposed to be transmitted to you through me. I kept the originals. If you doubt it, here are certified copies. You will see the notary's signature was dated last June. Does that convince you? "

" Where's the letters themselves? "

" With my brother. He is one of the sub-editors of the Ballston *Herald*. He is holding them subject to my orders. When he receives word from me he will either turn them over to the Federal authorities (for it is a United States Government matter, as you know, with a term of imprisonment involved, and not a mere State offence that can be settled with a few thousand dollars), or else he will publish the whole correspondence in his paper, and leave the Government to act as it sees fit. Does the card improve my hand?"

Conover made no immediate answer. When he spoke there was no emotion in his dry, business-like tones.

"Yes, it does," he admitted, "and I'm glad to see I was wrong about the condition of those brains of yours. You've got me. I could bluff anybody else, but I guess you know my game too well. A bluff's a blamed good anchor in a financial storm. But after the ship's wrecked I never heard that the cap'n got any special good out of the anchor. So we'll play straight, if you like. How much do you want?"

"How much?" she repeated, doubtful of his meaning.

"How much will you take for those Denzlow letters? Come now, let's cut out the measly diplomacy and get to the point. The man who gets ahead in my line of work is the man who knows when to pay hush money and when not to. This is the time to pay. How much? Make me a cash offer."

"You don't understand," protested Anice, again with a pretty, imperious gesture restraining Clive. " I am not one of the blackmailers you spend so much of your time silencing. I——"

" No? I never yet heard a scream that was so loud a big enough check wouldn't gag it. This interview isn't so allooring that I'm stuck on stretching it out any longer. Make your offer."

" I've explained to you that I want none of your money."

" Then what— Oh! " broke off Conover, clicking his teeth and narrowing his eyes to gleaming slits, " I think I see. The Governorship, eh? "

Anice inclined her head.

" So I'm to throw it to Standish? H'm! And yet you say you're not putting the hooks in me! If that isn't cold, straight, all-wool blackmail, I don't know what is. You think you owe me something because I didn't treat your father just square. So you pay the grudge off by blackmailing me. Maybe your holy New England conscience is too near-sighted to see it's only in the devil's ledger that two wrongs make a right."

" Do you speak from experience? Because it doesn't fit this case. I propose nothing of the sort."

" Then what in thunder *do* you want? "

snarled Caleb, thoroughly mystified. " If it ain't cash or——"

" I want you to give Mr. Standish a fair chance. That is all. I want you to remove the embargo from his speeches and advertising; to open the columns of every paper in the Mountain State to him. To promise not to molest him in any way, not to allow your rowdies to break up his meetings nor to prevent him from hiring halls. Not to stuff the ballot-boxes, falsify the returns, employ ' floaters ' or—in short, I want you to give him an equal chance with yourself; to conduct the campaign honestly, and to leave the issue solely to the voters. Will you do this? "

" And if I beat him at that? "

" If you are elected by an honest majority, that is no concern of ours. All I demand is that you fight in the open and leave the result to the people."

Caleb thought in silence for a few moments.

" If I do this? " he asked at last.

" Then, on the afternoon of Election Day, my brother shall turn over to you, or to your representative, the entire Denzlow correspondence."

" I have your word for that? Certified copies and all? "

" Yes."

" You don't lie. That's about the one foolish trait I've ever found in you. If I've got your word, you'll stand by it. Can't say quite the same of *me*, eh?"

" I don't think that needs an answer."

" Can't turn over the letters to me now, on my pledge to——?"

" I'm afraid not," said Anice, almost apologetically. " I must——"

" And you're dead right. A promise is such a sacred thing that it's always wise to keep your finger on the trigger till the real money's handed over. Just to keep the sacredness from spoiling. As I understand it, I'm to loosen up on Standish; and then if I lick him fair, you and I are quits? I'll do it. Such a fight ought to prove pretty amusing. It'll be an experience anyhow, as Sol Townsley said when Father Healy told him he'd some day burn in hell. I'll accept those silly terms of yours for the same reason so many men stay honest. They don't enjoy it, but it's more fun than going to jail. I'll send out the orders first thing in the morning. And on the afternoon of Election Day I'll get that Denzlow stuff?"

" Yes. And the certified copy the following morning."

" In case I should get absent-minded that night when the votes are counted? You're a clever girl, Miss Lanier. Pity you're to be wasted on Standish! Oh, that's all right. I don't need to be told. A girl like you isn't acting the way you do just for the sake of a measly principle. And now," his bantering tone changing to one of brusque command, "if there's nothing more, maybe you'll both get out. I'm tired, and——"

Clive and Anice withdrew. The latter, looking back as she left the room, saw Caleb sitting doubled over, motionless, in his chair, his gaze again on the fire.

Perhaps it was the flicker from the coals that made his face seem to her to have grown in a moment infinitely old; his keen, light eyes inexpressibly lonely and desolate. Undoubtedly so, for when he glanced up and saw she was not yet gone, there was no expression save the shadow of a sardonic grin stamped on his rugged features.

Long and late Caleb Conover sat there alone in his big, silent study. The lamp on the table flickered, guttered and went out. The live coals died down to embers. The cold of early autumn crept through the great room, along with the encroaching darkness. The clock on the wall chimed. Then again, and a third time, but the Railroader sat motionless.

At length he gathered himself together with an impatient grunt. He reached across to his table and drew from a drawer a gaudy velvet case. As he opened it, the dying firelight struck against a multi-pointed cluster of tiny lights.

" She wouldn't have took it from me," Caleb grumbled, half-aloud, as though explaining to some invisible companion, " but I would 'a' made Letty give it to her. It'd 'a' looked fine against that soft baby throat of hers. Hell! "

There was a swirling little eddy of cinders and sparks as the case crashed into the heart of the dull red embers.

The Railroader had fallen back into his former cramped, awkward attitude of reflection.

" First it was Jerry," he whispered to the imaginary auditor among the shadows. " First Jerry. Then Blanche. And now—*her*. That's worse than both the others put together. Not a one left."

The study door behind him was timidly opened. Caleb did not hear.

" Not a one left! " he murmured again. " And——"

" Is anything the matter, dear? " nervously queried his wife from the threshold. " It's nearly——"

" *You* don't count! " shouted Caleb Conover, with odd irrelevance. " Go to bed, can't you? "

CHAPTER XII

CALEB CONOVER FIGHTS

The real campaign was at last under way, and the Mountain State thrilled as never before in the history of politics. At a composite convention made up of the Republican and lesser parties of the State, and held almost directly after that of the Democrats, faction lines were cast aside and Clive Standish nominated by acclamation. Ansel had presided, and scores of bolting Democrats were in attendance.

Then, in Granite and throughout the State, Clive began what is still recalled as his "whirlwind campaign." Often ten speeches a day were delivered as he hurried from point to point. The reports of his meetings were sown broadcast, as was other legitimate campaign literature. Because of the daring and extraordinary course he had taken, as well as for the sane, practical reforms he advocated, he was everywhere listened to with growing interest.

The Mountain State was at last awake—

awake and hearkening eagerly to the voice of the man who had roused it from its Rip Van Winkle slumbers.

Horrified, wholly aghast, the Conover lieutenants had heard their master's decree that the press gag was to be removed, and other customary tactics of the sort abandoned. None dared to protest. And, after the first shock, the majority, in their sublime faith, read in the mandate some mysterious new manœuvre of the Railroader's which time would triumphantly justify.

Meantime, Conover was working as never before. The very difficulty of the task in hand evoked all his fighting blood. He would have preferred to win without so much labor. But since his ordinary moves were barred, his soul secretly rejoiced in the prospect of fair and furious battle. That he would conquer, as always before, he did not at first doubt. When he had made his bargain with Anice Lanier, he had done so confident in his power to sweep all opposition from his path; and he had secretly despised the girl for allowing herself to be duped.

He, on his part, knew he must forego the "landslide" he had once so confidently hoped for. But in the stress of later crises, this ambition had grown quite subservient to his greater and ever-augmentive longing for election at any terms and on any majority. The strengthening intensity of this ambition surprised Conover himself. At first mere pride had urged him to the office he sought. But as time went on and new obstacles arose between him and his goal, that goal waxed daily more desirable, until at last it filled the whole vista of his future.

His fingers ever on the pulse of the State, Caleb therefore noted with annoyance, then with something akin to dread, the swelling onrush of Clive's popularity. To offset it the Railroader threw himself bodily into the fight, personally directing and executing where of old he had only transmitted orders; toiling like any ward politician; devising each day new and brilliant tactics for use against the enemy.

He stuck to the letter of his pledge to Anice. Its spirit he had never regarded. He was everywhere and at all hours; now spending his money like water in the exact quarter where it would do most good; now propping up some doubtful corner of the political edifice he had reared, and again lending the fierce impetus of his individuality at points where his followers seemed inclined to lag.

Little as he spared himself, Caleb spared his henchmen still less. With deadly literalness he saw to the carrying out of his earlier order that everyone, from Congressman too bootblack, must put his shoulder to the wheel. The ward heelers, the privileged lieutenants, the rural agents and the high officials in the Machine, alike, were driven as never before. No stone was left unturned, no chance ignored. Nor was this all. Forth went the call to all the hundreds, rich and poor, whom Conover at various times had privately aided.

The capitalist whose doubtful bill he had shoved through the Assembly; the coal-heaver whose wife's funeral expenses he had paid; the Italian peddler whose family he had saved from eviction; the countless poor whom his secretly-donated coal, clothes and food had tided over hard winters; the struggling farmer whose mortgage he had paid; the bartender he had saved from a murderer's fate: all these beneficiaries and more were commanded, in this hour of stress, to remember the Boss's generosity, and to pay the debt by working for his election.

Checks of vast proportions (drawn ostensibly for railroad expenses) were cashed by Shevlin, Bourke and the rest, and the proceeds hurled into every crevice or vulnerable spot in the voting phalanx. The pick of the Atlantic seaboard's orators were summoned at their own price, and commissioned to sway the people to the Machine's cause. Conover even had wild thoughts of winning favor with his home-city's cultured classes by beautifying Granite's public gardens with the erecting of a heroic marble statue of Ibid (who, he declared, was his favorite poet, and had more sense than all the rest of the "Famous Quotation" authors put together). When at length he was reluctantly convinced as to "Ibid's" real meaning, the Railroader ordered the papers to suppress the proposed announcement and to substitute one to the effect that he intended to donate a colossal figure of Blind Justice for the summit of the City Hall.

On waged the fight. Disinterested outsiders beyond the scope of the Machine's attraction were daily drawn, by hundreds, into the Standish camp. In the country districts his strength grew steadily and rapidly. The people at large were aroused, not to the usual pitch of illogical hysteria incident on a movement of the sort, but to a calm, resolute jealousy of their own public rights. Which latter state every politician knows to be immeasurably the more dangerous of the two.

Conover's efforts, on the other hand, were already bearing fruit. His tireless energy, backed by his genius and the perfection of his system, were hourly enlarging his following. The "railroad wards" and slums of

Granite and of other towns were with him to a man, prepared on Election Day to hurl mighty cohorts of the Unwashed to the polls in their idol's behalf. Loyalty, self-interest, party allegiance, and more material forms of pressure were binding throngs of others besides these underworld denizens to the Conover standard. Not even the shrewdest nonpartisan dared forecast the result of the contest.

Caleb, colder, harder, less human than ever, gave no outward sign of the silent warfare that had torn him during that study-fire vigil on the night of Anice Lanier's defection. Beyond curtly stating that the secretary had left his service of her own accord, he gave no information concerning her. He had heard she was living with an aunt in another part of town; and twice, with stony face and unrecognizing eye, he had passed her on the street, walking with Clive. He had also received from her a brief, business-like note telling him that her brother had instructions to deliver to Conover's representative, any time after noon on Election Day, the Denzlow letters.

It was on the eve of election. The campaign work was done. One way or another, the story was now told. The last instructions for the next day's duties had been given. Conover, returning home from his headquarters, felt as though the weight of weeks had rolled off his shoulders. Now that he had done all mortal man could, he was not, like a weaker soul, troubled about the morrow. That could take care of itself. His worrying or not worrying could not affect the result. Hence, he did not worry.

As he turned into Pompton Avenue and started up the long slope crowned by the garish white marble Mausoleum, his step was as strong and untired as an athlete's. On his frame of steel and inscrutable face the untold strain of past weeks had left no visible mark.

A few steps in advance of him, and going in the same direction, slouched a lank, enervated figure.

The Railroader, by the gleam of a street lamp, recognized Gerald, and moved faster to catch up with him. At such rare intervals as he had time to think of domestic affairs, Caleb was more than a little concerned of late over the behavior of this only son of his. Since the visit of his wife to Granite, Gerald's demeanor had undergone a change that had puzzled even his father's acute mind. He had waxed listless, taciturn and unnaturally docile. No command seemed too distasteful for him to execute uncomplainingly. No outbreak of rough sarcasm or wrath from Caleb could draw from him a retort, nor so much as a show of interest. Conover knew the lad had taken to drinking heavily and frequently, but also that Gerald's deepest potations apparently had no other outward effect than to increase his listless apathy.

Partly from malice, partly to rouse the youth, Conover had thrown upon him many details of campaign work. To the older man's wonderment Gerald had accomplished every task with a quiet, wholly uninterested competence that was so unlike his old self as to seem the labor of another man. More and more, since Anice's departure, Conover had come to lean on Gerald's help. And now it no longer astonished him to find such help capably given. Yet the father was not satisfied.

"It ain't natural," he said to himself, as he now overhauled his son. "Ain't like Jerry. Something's the matter with him. He's getting to be some use in the world. But he'll go crazy, too, if he keeps up those moony ways of his. He needs a shaking up."

He instituted the shaking-up process in literal form by a resounding slap between Gerald's narrow shoulders. But even this most maddening of all possible salutations evoked nothing but a listless "Hello, father," from its victim.

" Start Weaver off for Grafton? " queried Caleb, falling into step with his son.

" Yes."

" Make out any of that padrone list I told you to frame up for me? "

" I've just finished it. Here it is."

" Why, for a chap like you that list's a day's work by itself! Good boy! "

No reply. Caleb glanced obliquely at the taciturn lad. The sallow, lean face, with its dark-hollowed eyes, was expressionless, dull, apathetic.

" Say! " demanded Conover, " what's the matter with you, anyhow? "

" Nothing."

" Ain't sick, or anything? "

" No."

" Still grouching over that girl? "

" My wife? Yes."

" Ain't got over it yet? I've told you you're well out of it. If she'd cared anything for you she'd never have settled with my New York lawyer for $60,000 and withdrawn that fool alienation suit she was starting against me, or signed that general release. You're well out of it. I'll send you up to South Dakota after the campaign's all over and let you get a divorce on the quiet. No one around here'll ever know you was married, and in the long run the experience won't hurt you. You've acted pretty decent lately, Jerry, and I'm not half sorry I changed my mind on that 'heavy-father' stunt and didn't kick you out. After all, one marriage more or less is more of an accident than a failing, so long as folks don't let it get to be a habit. You acted like an idiot. But bygones are bygones, so cut out the sulks. Cheap chorus girls weren't made for grown men to marry."

"I'll thank you to say nothing against her," intervened Gerald stiffly, with the first faint show of interest his father had observed in him for weeks.

"Just as you like," assented Caleb, in high, good humor, glad to have broken even so slightly into the other's armor of apathy. "In her case, maybe, least said the better. So you're still homesicking for her—and for New York, eh?"

"Yes."

"Still feel your own city ain't good enough for you?"

"What place is for a man who has lived in New York?"

"Rot! 'What place is?' About ten thousand places! And some seventy million Americans living in those places are as good and as happy and stand pretty near as good a chance of the pearly gates as if they had the heaven-sent blessing of living between the North and East rivers."

"Yes?"

There was no interest and only absent-minded query in Gerald's monosyllable. Listlessness had again settled over him. Word and mental attitude jarred on the Railroader.

"New York!" reiterated Conover. "I've took some slight pains to learn a few things about that place these last couple of months. Before that I took your word for it that it was a hectic, electric-lit whirlpool where nothing ever was quiet or sane, and where a young cub who could get arrested for smashing up a hotel lobby was looked up to as a pillar of gilded society. Since then I've bothered to find out on my own account. New York's a city with about two millions of people living on Manhattan Island alone. We out-of-town jays are told these two millions are a gay, abandoned, fashionable lot that spend their days in the congenial stunt of piling up fortunes and their nights in every sort of high jinks that can cost money and keep 'em up till dawn. 'All-night fun, all-day fortune-grabbing. Great place! Come see it!' Well, I *have* seen it. Along around five or six P.M. about ninety-eight per cent. of those two million people stop work. They've been fortune-grabbing all right, since early morning. Only, they've been grabbing it usually for some one else. They pile onto the subway or the elevated or the big bridge and—and where do they go? To a merry old all-night revel on the Great White Way? To an orgy of 'On-with-the-dance, let-joy-be-unrefined,' hey? Not them. It's home they go, quiet and without exhibiting to the neighbors any season passes for all-night dissipation. They are as respectable, decent, orderly, early-to-bed a crowd as if they lived on a farm. 'Tain't their fault if 'home's' usually built on the folding-bed plan and more condensed than a can of patent milk. Apart from that, they live just as everybody else in this country lives—no better, no worse, no gayer, no quieter. There's not a penny's difference between that decent ninety-eight per cent. and the business and working folks right here in Granite."

Gerald did not answer. He had not heard.

"That's the 'typical New Yorker,'" went on Caleb. "The 'typical New Yorker'—ninety-eight per cent. of him—is the typical every-day man or woman of any city. He does his work, supports his family, and goes to bed before eleven. Those are the folks I guess *you* didn't see much of when you was there. Nor of the *real* society push or even the climbers. The society headliners are too few anyhow to count in the general percentage. Besides, they're out of town half the year. *You* was mostly engaged in playing 'Easy Mark' for the other two per cent. The crowd you went with is the sort that calls themselves 'typical New Yorkers,' and stays out all night 'cause they haven't the brains to find any other place to go. Just a dirty little fringe of humanity, hanging about all-night restaurants or drinking adulterated booze in some thirst emporium, or spending some one else's money in a green-table joint. They yawn and look sick of life, and they tell everyone who'll listen that they're 'typical New Yorkers.'

"Lord! you might as well say our two per cent. Chinese population is typical Americans. First time I ever was in New York overnight I walked from Ninetieth Street down to Fourteenth, at about one in the morning, taking in a few side streets on the way. I didn't meet on an average of two people to the block, and every light was out in nineteen houses out of twenty. Down along part of Broadway I saw a few tired, frowsy-looking folks in big restaurants, and a few drunks and a girl or two, and some half a dozen cabs prowling about. That was 'gay New York by night. Hilarious and reeskay attractions furnished by typical

New Yorkers!' Whenever I hear that chestnut about 'typical New Yorkers,' I think of old Baldy Durling up in Campgaw, who was sixty years old when he went to his first circus. He stood half an hour in front of the dromedary's stall, taking in all its queer bumps and funny curves, and then he looks around, kind of defiant at the crowd, and yells out: 'Hell! There *ain't* no such animal!'"

A polite smile from the dry lips, which Gerald of late was forever moistening, was the only reply to this harangue. Caleb gave up trying to draw the youth into an argument, and adopted a more business-like tone.

"I want you should run down to Ballston for me soon's you've voted to-morrow, Jerry. Better take the 7.15 train. I want you to go to the office of the Ballston *Herald*, and give a note from me to Bruce Lanier, one of the editors. He'll hand you a package. Nothing that amounts to much, but I've paid a big price for it, so I don't want it lost. Take good care of it, and bring it back on the two o'clock train. Get all the sleep you can to-night. You're liable to have a wakeful day."

"All right."

"The package Lanier's to give you is just a bunch of letters about a railroad deal. Nothing you'd understand. They're to be ready for me any time after noon to-morrow."

"I thought you wanted me to work at the polls for you."

"Anybody that knows how to lie can work at the polls. There's nobody but you I can send for those letters. All the other men I can trust can't be spared to-morrow."

"Bruce Lanier," repeated Gerald idly. "Any relation to Miss——"

"Only a relation by marriage. He's her brother."

"Nice sort of girl, always seemed to me. What'd she leave you for?"

"She left of her own accord."

"So you told me. But why?"

"Because she got a crazy idea that I was the original Unpardonable Sinner. And having made up her mind to it, she natcher'lly didn't want her opinions shaken by any remarks for the defence. So she left."

Gerald did not pursue the subject. He seldom, indeed, dwelt so long, nowadays, on any one theme of talk. He moistened his dry lips once more, sucked at his cigarette and slouched along in silence. His father asked several questions that bore on the impending election, and was answered in monosyllables. The cigarette burned down to its cork tip, and

Gerald lighted another at its smouldering stump.

" Have a cigar? " suggested Caleb, viewing this operation with manifest disgust.

" No, thanks."

" It's better'n one of those measly connecting links between fire and a fool," grunted Caleb. Gerald puffed on without answering.

" I *said*," repeated Caleb, a little louder, " the rankest Flor de Garbage campaign cigar, with a red-and-yaller surcingle around its waist, it a blamed sight better'n any Cairo, Illinois, Egyptian cig'rette. Is there five minutes a day when you're not smoking one? "

" No."

" 'Tain't good for any man, smoking so much as that, 'spesh'ly a man with a boy's size chest like yours. Stunts the growth, too, I hear, and——"

"I've got my growth."

" You sure have," agreed Caleb, looking up and down his son's weedy length, " and you'd 'a' had still more if so much of you hadn't been turned up for feet. Well, smoke away and drink away, too, if you like. I'm not responsible for you. Only you'll smash up or turn queer one of these days if you don't look out. Is it the booze or the near-tobacco that makes your lips all dry like that? Neither of 'em usually has that effect. Your hands are wet and cold all the time, too. Better see a doctor, hadn't you?"

"Oh, I'm all right," said the lad wearily.

Caleb looked in doubt at his listless companion, seemed inclined to say more on the subject, then changed his mind.

"Be ready for the 7.15 to-morrow morning," he ordered as they mounted the broad marble steps of the Mausoleum. "Turn in early and get a good rest. Lord! I hope this drizzle will turn into rain before morning. Nothing like a rainy election day to drown reform. The honest heeler would turn out in a blizzard to earn his two dollars by voting, but a sprinkle will scare a Silk Socker from the polls easier'n a——"

The great door was swung open. Outlined against the lighted hall behind it was Mrs. Conover. She had seen their approach, and had hastened out into the veranda to meet them.

"Hello!" exclaimed the Railroader. "This is like old times! Must be twenty years since you came out to——"

"Oh, Caleb!" sobbed the little woman, and as the light for the first time fell athwart her face, they saw she was red-eyed and blotched of cheek from much weeping. "Oh, Caleb, how long you've been! I telephoned the

Democratic Club an hour ago, and they said you'd just——"

"What's the row?" broke in her bewildered husband. "Afraid I'd been ate by your big nephew, or——"

"Don't, don't joke! Something dreadful's happened. I——'

"Then come into the library and tell us about it quiet," interrupted Caleb, "unless maybe you're aiming to call in the servants later for advice."

The footman behind Mrs. Conover, at the door, tried to look as though he had heard nothing, and bitterly regretted he had not been allowed to hear more. But Letty was silenced as she always was when the Railroader adopted his present tone. She obediently scuttled down the hall toward the library, an open letter fluttering in her hand. Caleb followed; and, at a word from his father, Gerald accompanied his parents.

As soon as the library door closed behind the trio, Mrs. Conover's grief again rose from subdued sniffling to unchecked tears.

"Oh, talk out, can't you!" growled Conover. "What's up? That letter there? Is——?"

"Yes," gurgled poor Letty, torn between the luxury of weeping and the fear of offending Caleb, "it's—it's from Blanche at Lake

Como, and—and— Oh, she isn't married at all—and——!"

"WHAT?" roared Conover. Even Gerald dropped his cigarette.

"It's—it's *true*, Caleb!" wailed Letty. "She isn't. And——"

"What are you blithering about? Here!"

Conover snatched the letter and glanced over it. Then with a snort he thrust it back into his wife's hand.

"French!" he sniffed, in withering contempt. "Why in hell can't the girl write her own language, so folks can understand what she's——?"

"She's always written her letters to me in French ever since she was at school in Passy. They told her it——"

"Never mind what they told her. What's the letter say? Ain't married? Why——!"

"She *was* married. But she isn't. And——"

"You talk like a man in a cave. Is d'Antri dead, or——"

Her husband's frenzied impatience, as usual, served to drive the cowed little rabbit-like woman into worse agonies of incoherence. But by degrees, and through dint of much questioning, the whole sordid petty tragedy related in the Como postmarked letter was at length extracted from her.

Blanche, thanks to her heavy dower and her prince's family connections, had cut more or less of a swath in certain strata of continental society during these early days of her stay in d'Antri's world. Her husband's ancestral rock with its tumble-down castle had been bought back, and the edifice itself put into course of repair. A bijou little house on the Parc Monceau and a palazzo at Florence had been added to the Conover fortune's purchases, and at each of these latter abodes a gaudy fête had been planned, to introduce the American princess and her dollars to the class of people who proposed henceforth to endure the one for the sake of the other.

Then, according to the letter, a château on the north shore of Como had been rented for the autumn months. Here the bride and groom had dwelt in Claude Melnotte fashion for barely a week when another woman appeared.

The newcomer was a singer formerly employed at the Scala, but now just returned from a prolonged South American tour. Her voice had given out, and, faced by poverty, she had prudenty unearthed certain proofs to the effect that, twelve years earlier, she had secretly married Prince Amadeo d'Antri, then a youth of twenty-two.

Thus equipped, she had descended on the

happy pair, and a most painful scene had ensued. D'Antri, confronted with the documents, had made no denial, but had tearfully assured Blanche that he had supposed the woman dead. Be this as it might, the first wife had been so adamantine as to refuse with scorn the rich allowance d'Antri offered her, and had carried the matter to the Italian courts.

There it was promptly decided that, as Amadeo's princely title was chiefly honorary, and carried no royal prerogatives of morganatic unions, the first marriage held.

"So I am without a home and without a name," laboriously translated Letty, punctuating her daughter's written sentences with snuffle and moan. "What am I to do? Poor Amadeo is disconsolate. It would break your heart to witness his grief. But he cannot help me. Most of our ready money has gone into the houses we have bought and other necessaries. The bulk of my *dot* is, of course, deeded to Amadeo, according to continental custom, and it seems the poor fellow's ignorance of finance has led him to invest it in such a way that for the present it is all tied up. I am without money, without friends. *Helas!* I——"

"In other words," interpolated Caleb, "he's got her cash nailed down, and now he's kicking her out dead broke, while he and the other woman——"

"I start to-morrow for Paris," continued the letter. "I have just about money enough to get me there, and I shall stay with the Pages until you can send for me. Oh, Mother, *please* make it all right with Father if you can. Don't let him blame poor Amadeo. You know how Father always——"

"Well, go on!" commanded the Railroader grimly.

"That's about all," faltered Letty. "The rest is just——"

"A eulogy on the old man, eh? Let it go at that. Now——"

"Oh, what *are* we to do?" drivelled the poor woman, sopping her eyes. "And all the——"

"All the splurge we made, and the way our dutiful girl was going to boost us into the Four Hundred?" finished Caleb. "Thank the Lord, it comes too late for a campaign document! But I guess it about wrecks my last sneaking hope of landing on the social hay-pile. Never mind that part of it now. We'll have all the rest of our lives to kick ourselves over the way we've been sold. And I'll give myself the treat, as soon as I can get away, of running over to Yurrup and having Friend d'Antri sent to jail for bigamy and treated real gentle and loving while he's there, if a million-dollar tip to the right politicians in Italy will do it. And I guess it will. But I *can't* get away till after this election business is all cleared up. And Blanche's got to be brought home right off. Jerry!"

His son's momentary interest in the family crisis had already lapsed. He was sitting, stupid, glazed of eye, staring at the floor. At his father's call he glanced up.

"You'll have to go to Paris for her," went on Conover, "and bring her back. Take the next steamer. There's boats sailing on most of the lines Wednesdays. Let's see, this is Monday. Go to Ballston, as you were going to, to-morrow morning. Get that package from Lanier, and send it to me from there by registered mail. Be sure to have it registered. Then catch the afternoon train to New York. That ought to get you in by five-thirty or six. I'll telegraph Wendell to-night to find out what's the fastest steamer sailing next morning, and tell him to take passage for you. Hunt him up as soon as you reach town. And sleep on board the boat. That'll cut out any chance of your missing it. Bring Blanche back here to us by the earliest steamer from France or England that you can get. And while you're in Paris, if you can hire some one on the quiet to drop over into Italy and put d'Antri into the accident ward of some dago hospital for a month or two, I don't mind paying five thousand for the job. Come up to my study, and I'll fix you up financially for the trip, and give you that note to Bruce Lanier."

Gerald heard and nodded assent to the rapped-out series of directions with as little emotion as though commanded to transmit some campaign message to Billy Shevlin. His father, noting the quiet attention and response, was pleased therewith. And the latent fondness and trust which were slowly placing his recent contempt for his only and once adored son, perceptibly increased.

As the two men left the room, Mrs. Conover looked lovingly after Gerald through her tears.

"Poor dear boy!" she soliloquized. "He's getting to be quite his old bright self again. When Caleb mentioned his going to New York his eyes lighted up just the way they used to when he was little."

All unaware that she had detected something which even the Railroader's vigilance had overlooked, the good woman once more abandoned herself to the joys of a new and delightfully unrestrained fit of weeping.

When at last she and her husband were together, alone, that night, Mrs. Conover had some thought of commenting upon that fleeting expression she had caught on Gerald's face. But Caleb was so immersed in his own unpleasant thoughts she lacked the courage to intrude upon his reflections.

Which is rather a pity, for had she done so, the inefficient little woman might have changed the history of the Mountain State.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FOURTH MESSENGER OF JOB

THE rain Caleb Conover had so eagerly desired as a check on fair weather reformers' Election Day zeal began soon after midnight, and with it a gale that is still remembered as the "Big November Wind."

The wind-whips lashed the many-windowed Mausoleum, and the roar and swirl of dashing water echoed from roof and veranda-cover. The autumn gale-blasts set the naked trees to creaking and groaning like sentient things. Here and there a huge branch was ripped from its trunk and ploughed a gash in the lawn's withered turf. More than one maple and ash on the Conover grounds crashed to earth with a rending din that was drowned in the howl of the storm.

A belated equinoctial was sweeping the Mountain State, driven on the breath of a tornado such as not one year in twenty can record, east of the Mississippi. Its screaming onset unroofed houses, tore up forest giants, wrecked telegraph lines, buffeted fragile dwellings to their fall and dissolved hayricks into miles of flying wisps.

Yet none of the three members of the Conover family, sheltered within the Mausoleum, were awakened by the bellow of the cyclone, for none were asleep. Letty, alone in her great, hideous bedroom, lay alternately praying and weeping in maudlin comfortlessness over her absent daughter; and at sound of the hubbub outside wept the more and prayed with an added terror.

Gerald, despite the early start he must make in the morning, was still dressed, and was slouching back and forth in his suite of apartments, muttering occasionally to himself, and at other times pausing to gaze lifelessly ahead of him. As the ever-louder voice of the storm broke in on his thoughts, he stopped short in his aimless march, his dry lips twitching and on his face the nervous terror of a suddenly awakened child. He shambled into an inner chamber, unlocked and opened a drawer in his chiffonier, fumbled for a moment or two with something he took therefrom, then closed and locked the drawer and returned to the light. In a few moments the nervousness had died out of his face and bearing, and with a return of his habitual listless air he had resumed his walk.

Caleb Conover, stretched on a camp-bed in the corner of his study, smiled contentedly as the rain beat in torrents on the panes. But when the gale waxed fiercer and the rain at last ceased, he frowned.

"Going to blow off clear and cold after all!" he grumbled, turning over. "And the Weather Bureau's the only one that can't be 'fixed.'"

But even the shriek of the storm could not long hold his attention. The Railroader was vaguely troubled as to himself. Heretofore, like Napoleon's, his steel will had been able to dictate to Nature as imperiously as to his fellow-man. When he had commanded the presence of Sleep, the drowsy god had hastened on the moment to do his bidding. He had slumbered or awakened at wish. On the eve of his greatest crisis he had been unable to sleep like a baby. Yet for the past few weeks he had been aware of a subtle change. Sleep had deserted him, even as had so much else that he had loftily regarded as his to command.

He had acquired an unpleasant habit of lying awake for hours in that big lonely study of his, of seeking in vain to recover his old-time power of perfect self-mastery. Thought, Memory, Unrest—a trio that never could unduly assail him in saner hours—now had a way of rushing in upon the insomniac with the extinguishing of the last light. To-night these unwelcomed guests were lingering still longer than usual, and all the Conover's dominating will-power failed to banish them.

At length he gave over the struggle and let his vagrant fancies have their will. Was he growing old, he wondered, that his forces—mental, physical and political—thus wavered?

Worry? He had heard others complain of it, and he had laughed at them. Nerves? Those were for women. Not for a man with an eighteen-inch neck. Then what ailed him? He had been this way ever since—ever since— Yes, it was the night Anice Lanier left that he had first lain awake.

Anice Lanier! He had never analyzed his feelings toward her. He had been dully satisfied to know that in her presence he ever had an unwonted feeling of content, of sure knowledge that she would understand; that she was as unlike his general idea of women as he himself differed from his equally contemptuous estimate of other men; that he was at his best with her. Had he been less practical and more given to hackneyed phrases of thought, he would have said she inspired him.

But now? The Railroader could not yet force himself to dwell on the jarring end of all that. He tried to think of something else.

Blanche? Yes, *there* was a nice sort of complication, wasn't it? Another international marriage and the usual ending thereof.

"These foreigners can give us poor Yankee jays cards and spades at the bunco game!" he mused, half-admiringly. "They beat *our* 'con' men hands down, for they don't even need to pay out cash in manufacturing green goods and gold bricks, and they don't get jugged when they're found out. When'll American girls get sense? When their parents do, I presume."

And this unwelcome answer to his own question brought him back to the memory of his joy at hearing of Blanche's proposed marriage to d'Antri. It had seemed to him to set the capstone of fulfilment to his social yearnings. As father of a princess, he had in fancy seen himself at last exalted amid the close-serried ranks of that class to whom only his wealth had heretofore entitled him to ingress. And money—even *his* money—had failed to act as *open sesame*. But surely as father-in-law to a prince——

Even the very patent fiasco attendant on his one effort to use this relationship as a master key to the portals of society had not wholly discouraged him. Later, when, practically by acclamation, he should have won the Governorship, and when the Princess d'Antri's European triumphs should be noised abroad in Granite, surely *then*——

But now there was no question of acclamation. If he should win it would be by bare margin. He knew that. And, as for Blanche—well, if he could keep the worst of the scandal out of the American papers and make people think his daughter had come home merely because her husband abused her, or because she was tired of her surroundings—if he could achieve this much it would be the best he could expect.

Gerald, too; he had hoped so much from the boy's glittering New York connections. Now *that* illusion was forever gone. Though his son's more recent behavior had in a slight measure softened the hurt to paternal pride and hope, yet the hurt itself, Caleb knew, must always remain. And that particular pride and hope were forever dead.

The Railroader was not in any sense a religious devotee. For appearance sake, however, and to add still further force to his liberal gifts to the Catholic clergy, he semi-occasionally attended mass at the Cathedral. He also, for other reasons, occupied now and then, with Letty, his higher-priced pew in the Episcopal church of St. Simeon Stylites, religious rendezvous of Granite's smart set.

At one of these two places of worship—he could not now remember which—and, after all, it didn't matter—he had heard, some time recently, a Scripture reading that had held his attention more closely than did most passages of the sort. It was a story of some man—he could not remember whom—the recital of whose continued and unmerited ill-luck had stamped itself on the hearer's mind. The man had been rich, prosperous, happy. Then one day four messengers had come to him in swift succession, with tales of disaster to goods and family, each narration telling of worse misfortunes than had its predecessor. And the fourth had left its recipient stripped of wealth and family.

In a quaint twist of thought Conover, as he lay staring up into the dark and listening to the noisy rage of the storm, fell to fitting the biblical story to his own case.

" The first message I got," he reflected, becoming grimly entertained in his own analogy, " knocked over my plans for Jerry. Then the second stole from me the only square woman I ever knew and all my chances of a campaign walkover. The third smashed my idees for Blanche, and for making a hit in society. The fourth—well, I guess the fourth ain't showed up yet. Will it clean me out when it *does* come, I wonder, like it did the feller in the Bible? Let's see, *he* had a whiny fool for a wife, too, if I remember it straight. Yes, there's a whole lot of points in common between me and him. I wonder if he ever run for any office. How was it all those messages of his wound up? 'And—and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.' That was it.

"I wonder was he the same chap that had all those devils cast out of him. I don't just remember, but whoever it was that had 'em cast out, I'd like to 'a' known him, for he was a *man*. Most folks' natures ain't big enough to hold a single half-size devil, let alone a whole crowd of 'em. If that Bible chap had all those it showed he was a man enough to hold 'em. And if only one of 'em had been cast out it'd 'a' been a bigger thing he did than it would be for a dozen ordinary men to turn into saints. Maybe I'm a little bit like *that* feller, too."

After which plunge into the theological exegesis—the first and last whereof he ever was guilty—Caleb Conover turned his thoughts to the morrow's election, and thus communed with himself till dawn caught him open-eyed and unsleepy, his splendid strength and energy in nowise diminished by forty-eight hours of wakefulness.

It was a tattered, desolate world that met the Railroader's eyes as he gazed down from his window across the broad grounds and over the city that lay at their foot. The wind had fallen, and a pink-gray light was filling the clean-swept sky. Nature seemed ashamed to look on the results of her own violence, for the dawnlight crept timidly over the sleeping houses.

Everywhere were strewn signs of the hurricane. Tree branches, toppled chimneys, unroofed shanties, swaths of telegraph and telephone wires, overturned fences; these and a thousand other proofs of the gale's brief power lay broadcast throughout Granite's streets.

And, with the first glimmers in the east, the people of city and State were afoot, for history was to be made. Election Day had begun.

Midnight had again come around. The election was long since over, yet the city did not ring with the uproar incident on such affairs. For the result was not yet known. The storm of the previous night had cut off telegraph and telephone communication in twenty parts of the Mountain State. Granite itself was isolated. Hundreds of mechanics were at work repairing the various lines of broken wire and replacing overthown poles. But the work had not yet sufficiently progressed to allow the full transmission of election returns from the up-State counties.

Train service remained unimpaired, save for an occasional broken trestle on one or two of the minor branches of the C. G. & X. And since nightfall some of the returns had been brought to Granite by rail, but these merely proved the closeness of the conflict, and gave no true hint as to the actual outcome. The Granite vote was all in, hours ago. From the slums and the dark places of the city's underworld the long-trained servants of the Machine had swarmed to the polls, overwhelming all opposition from the smaller and more respectable element, and had carried Granite tumultuously for Conover.

The Railroader, with a dozen or more men —district leaders, ward captains and picked adherents of his own—sat about the big centre table of his study, an Arthur, somewhat changed in the modernizing and surrounded by equally altered Paladins. A telegraph operator sat at an instrument in a far corner of the room, jotting down and carrying to the table such few despatches as were at last beginning to trickle in. At Conover's left a ticker purred forth infrequent lengths of message-laden tape.

The table was littered with papers, yellow sheets of " flimsy," bottles, glasses and open cigar boxes. The henchmen lounged about, drinking and smoking in nervous suspense, fighting over again the day's battle, and hazarding innumerable diverse opinions on the bearing each new despatch would have on the general result. All were in a greater or less state of tension, and relieved it by frequent resource to the battalion of bottles that dotted the board.

Conover, alone of them all, touched no liquor. Before him was a big cup of black coffee, which a noiseless-treading footman entered the room every few minutes to renew.

"Ain't that li'ble to keep you awake tonight, Boss?" asked Shevlin, as he watched the fourth cupful vanish at a swallow.

"It don't bother me any more," returned Caleb, "I'm too used to it. But I can remember when a single cup of it at Sunday morning breakfast would make me so I couldn't sleep a wink all church time. I'd toss from one end of my pew to the other the whole morning. I couldn't seem to drowse no matter how long Father Healy's sermon was. 'Nother county heard from?" as the operator laid a message before him. "Read it, Billy."

"Delayed in transmission," spelled Shevlin. "Jericho County, with two precincts missing, gives Conover 7,239, Standish 4,895."

A yell went around the table. Bourke scribbled hurriedly on a pad, then announced:

"That offsets the Standish lead in Haldane by 780. Two to one you've got Bowden, too."

A purr from the ticker, and Caleb caught up the tape.

"This machine don't agree with you," he reported. "Bowden complete gives me 5,861 and Standish 6,312. That cuts us down a bit."

"Did you ever see such a rag-time 'lection!" growled Shevlin. "It's like a seesaw board. One minute it's you, and the next minute it ain't. What's the hay-eaters up-State thinkin' about, anyhow? A year ago they'd no more 'a' dared to——"

"A year's a long time, son, in a country that makes a hero to order one day and puts him into the discard the next."

"Oh, if you'd 'a' only just let us work like we always have before! We'd 'a' sent this Standish person screechin' up a tree. He'd 'a' thought a whale had bit him! But with all this amachoor line of drorin'-room stunts at the polls an' givin' him the chance to——"

"That's *my* business," replied Caleb. "Cut it out."

And Billy relapsed into grumbling incoherence. Nor did any of the rest dare voice their equally strong opinions on the subject of Conover's recent mystifying campaign tactics. Had a less powerful Boss dictated and carried out such a senselessly honest plan of battle, his leadership would have ended with the issuance of his first order. Impregnable as had been Conover's position in the machine, he himself well knew he had strained his power and influence wellnigh to the breaking point. Should he, in spite of his self-confidence and the wondrous skill he had employed along this new line of warfare, lose the day——

"Coming in better now," remarked the operator after a fusillade of clicks had held his attention to the instrument for a minute or two. "They've got the lines patched up enough to allow you straight service. The stuff'll all be here in a rush pretty soon."

"Here comes some more ticker reports!" cried Staatz, leader of the Third District, and strongest man, next to Conover himself, in all the Machine. "Why can't it hurry up? Here—'Pompton County complete gives Conover 28,042, Standish 6,723.'"

Another and louder yell from the tableful, and a battering of bottles and glasses on the board. Conover alone sat calm through the din. Bourke again did rapid figuring.

"Hooray!" he yelled. "That brings it

up all right. Pompton County and the city of Granite together give you enough plurality to stall all the jay counties except——"

"It hangs on the one city of Grafton now," interposed Caleb, who had as usual gripped the whole situation before his lieutenant had jotted down the first line of figures. We've got enough reports to bring it up to that. We know where we stand everywhere else, except in a few places too small to count. As Grafton goes, the State will go. That's a cinch."

"That's right," admitted Bourke after another spasm of ciphering. "But how'd you get onto us when the rest of us——?"

"If I didn't get onto things before the rest of you did, one of you would be sitting at the head of this table instead of me."

The Railroader glanced, as by accident, toward Staatz, who coughed raucously and plunged at once into talk.

"Pete Brayle tried to backtrack us on the sly in Pompton County, I hear," said the latter. "Thought it'd get him a soft place in the reform gang in case they won. A lot of good it did him."

"Brayle's always looking for soft places," observed Caleb dryly. "And he ain't the only one. Such fellers gen'rally end up in a soft place, all right. Only it's apt to be a swamp, and that's——"

"Jericho County complete returns," translated the operator aloud, as his machine began again to click out its news, "Conover 7,910, Standish 5,495."

"Why don't we hear from Grafton?" asked Staatz.

"They're patching up the connection now," answered the operator. "It's farthest city on the line. You've got all the rest of the returns from its county."

"That place is a regular nest of reformers, from the mayor down," commented Bourke. "And besides, Standish won a lot of votes by his grand-stand scrap in the op'ra house there last month. It looks bad."

"Most reform places do after they've tried a dose of their own medicine for awhile," answered Caleb. "But we've spent enough good dough there to square the whole noble army of martyrs. I guess Grafton's O. K."

"Boss," said Billy Shevlin, "you're the only man in this whole shootin' match what ain't all hectic over this fight. An' you're the one man who's *It* or out in th' woolly white snow accordin' to th' way that genial beast of prey th' free an' independent an' otherwise bought-up voters jumps. Ain't you worried none?"

"What good'd that do? No use paying twice, if there's anything to worry about. And if there ain't, what's the use of wasting a lot of good anxiety? Start my phonograph going."

"Phonograph?" hotly protested Staatz. "At a time like this, when everything hangs on the next half hour and——"

"Well," drawled Caleb, and if his words were light, his steady eyes fixed the district leader's vexed gaze as a wasp might pierce an angry, blundering bumblebee, "I don't believe the voters of the Mountain State'll rise in arms to any extent and demand a new election and a new Boss just because they hear I wanted a little music. I like the phonograph. It's the only musical instrument I ever had time to learn to play. And it's the only one that'll play over the pieces I like as often as I want to hear 'em, and won't make me listen to a lot of opera war-whoops in Dutch and Dago. But, say, Staatz, I'm not forcing other folks to listen to it. If you're not stuck on the way I amuse myself, there ain't nobody exactly imploring you to stay on here."

Staatz, his red face redder than its wont, and his great gray mustache abristle at the Railroader's tone and look, nevertheless mumbled some apology. But Caleb did not hear him out. He broke in on the words with a curt nod, then said to Shevlin:

"Start it up, Billy. Any old tune'll do. There's none there but the kind I like. Might try——"

Again the footman came in. This time not with coffee, but with a card.

"I thought I told Gaines I wasn't to be broke in on this evening," began Conover, glowering at the intruder. "Say I can't see anyone. I'm busy, and——"

He had taken the card as he spoke. Now, as he read it, his order trailed off into perplexed silence, even as Billy Shevlin, his face one big grin at Staatz's discomfiture, started the phonograph on the classic strains of "Everybody Works but Father."

"Turn off that measly racket!" roared Caleb. "Ain't you got any better sense than to go fooling with toys a time like this? I'll be back in a few minutes, boys. My New York lawyer wants me for something."

He left the study and hurried downstairs to where, in the hall, a man stood awaiting him.

"Come in here, Wendell," directed the Railroader, shaking hands with his new guest, and leading the way to the library. "What're *you* doing in this part of the country? Glad to see you."

"I bring you bad news—very bad news, I am afraid," began the lawyer as Conover closed the library door behind them.

"I know that," snapped Caleb. "I knew it as soon as I saw your face, but I didn't want you shouting it out in the hall where my butler could hear you. That's why I—well, what is it? Tell me, can't you?"

"Your son——"

"Yes, Jerry, of course. I knew that, too. But what's he done this time?"

"This is, as I said, a very serious——"

"Good Lord, man! I didn't s'pose you'd took a four-hour train ride from New York a night like this to tell me he'd won a ping pong prize or joined the Y. M. C. A. The chap that's got to have news broke to him has a head too thick for truth to be let into it any other way. Don't stand there like a lump of putty. What's up?"

The lawyer, flushing at the coarse invective, spared the father no longer. He spoke, and to the point.

"Your son," he said, "is in the West Thirtieth Street police station on a charge of murder."

Conover looked at him without a start, without visible emotion. For a full half minute he made no reply, no comment. Nor did his light, keen eyes flicker or turn aside.

Then—and Wendell feared from his words that the tidings had turned Caleb's brain—the Railroader muttered, half to himself:

"'And I only am escaped alone to tell thee.'"

CHAPTER XIV

CALEB CONOVER LOSES AND WINS

"I DON'T quite understand," ventured the puzzled lawyer.

"Neither do I," said Caleb. "Tell me your story as brief as you can."

"Your son reached town a little after six o'clock this evening," answered Wendell. "It seems he went directly to a restaurant in the theatre district of Broadway, a place frequented by men of a certain class and by the women they take there. It was early, but on account of the election night fun to come later many people were already dining. Gerald afterward told me he went there in the hope of catching a glimpse of his former wife. He saw her there. With her was a man she had known before she met your son, a bookmaker named Stange, whom Gerald—or Gerald's money—had originally won her from, and for whom he always, it appears, retained some jealousy. Gerald walked straight up to the table where they sat, drew a revolver and fired four times point-blank in Stange's face.

Any one of the shots by itself would have been fatal. Then he tossed the revolver to a waiter and spent the time until the police arrived in trying to console this Montmorency woman and to quiet her hysterics. They took him to the Tenderloin station and he got the police to telephone for me. I found him in a state of semi-collapse. A police surgeon was working over him. Heart failure brought on by excitement. His heart was already in a depressed, weakened state, the surgeon said, from an overdose of morphine. The poor boy apparently was in the habit of taking it, for they found a case with a hypodermic syringe and tablets in his pocket. And one of his arms——"

"So that was the 'third thing' beside booze and cigarettes?"

It was Caleb's first interruption. During the recital of his son's crime he had stood motionless, expressionless. Not until this trivial detail was reached had he spoken. And even now his voice was as emotionless as was his face. The inscrutable Spartan quiet that had so often left his business and political opponents in the dark was now upon him. Wendell saw and wondered. Mistaking the other's mental attitude for the first daze of horror, he resumed:

"He came around in a few minutes. I did

what I could for him. Then I tried to reach you by long-distance telephone. But the wires were down all through this State. I had no better fortune in telegraphing. So I caught the eight-ten train and came straight here. I thought you ought to be told at once, so that——"

"Quite so. Thank you. It was very white. I'm sorry I was so brisk with you awhile ago."

The lawyer stared. Conover was talking as though a mere financial matter were involved. Still supposing his client suffering from shock that dulled his sensibilities, Wendell continued:

"Morphine and jealousy combining to cause temporary insanity. That must be our line of defence. You agree with me of course?"

"Suit yourself. I'll stand by whatever you suggest."

The lawyer drew out his watch.

"Twelve forty-five," he said. "The New York express passes through Granite at one twenty. We'll have plenty of time to catch it. If you will get ready at once, we'll start. We can discuss details during the trip."

"'We'?" echoed Caleb. "What d'ye mean? *I'm* not going to New York with you."

"Mr. Conover!" exclaimed Wendell, shaking his inert host by the shoulder to rouse him from his apparent stupor, "you don't realize! Gerald is in a cell on a murder charge. To-morrow he will be sent to the Tombs—our city prison—to remain until his case comes up. Then he will be tried for his life and——"

"I know all about the course of such things. You don't need to tell me."

"But this is a life-and-death matter!"

"Well, if *I* can keep cool over it, I presume *you* can, can't you? It's very kind of you to explain all this to me, but it ain't necessary. I understand everything you've told me, and I understand a lot you've overlooked. For instance, the pictures that'll be in all to-morrow's evening papers of my boy on his way to the Tombs, handcuffed to a plain-clothes man, and pictures of that chorus woman of his in all sorts of poses, and pictures of the 'stricken father'—that's me—and Letty figuring as the 'aged mother, heartbroke at her son's crime.' And my daughter and her—the Prince d'Antri. And my house and a diagram of the restaurant where the shooting was done. And there'll be interviews with the Montmorency thing and accounts of her being brave and visiting Jerry in the Tombs. And a maynoo of what he'll have for Thanksgiving dinner in his cell. And——"

"I'll do what I can to prevent publicity. I——"

"You'll do nothing of the sort. What happens in public the public has a right to read about. If Jerry's dragged us into the limelight, can we kick if the papers let folks see us there?"

"But surely——"

"That's the easiest part of it. I've got to face my wife with this story. Not to-night, but to-morrow anyhow. Sweet job, eh? A white man don't enjoy squashing the life out of even a guinea-pig in cold blood, let alone a boy's mother. And reporters'll begin coming here by sunrise for interviews, and folks'll be staring at us in the street and offering their measly sympathy and then running off to tell the neighbors how we took it. And every paper we pick up will be full of the 'latest d'vel'pments' and all that. And those of us who know Jerry will get into the pleasing habit of remembering what a cute, friendly kid he used to be when he was little, and the great things we used to dream he'd do when he grew up, and how we hustled so's he'd have as good a chance in life as any young feller on earth. And then we'll remember he's waiting in jail to be tried for murdering a chorus slattern's lover, and all the black, filthy shame he's put on decent folks that was fools enough to love him, and the way he's fulfilled them silly hopes of ours. Oh, yes, Wendell, I guess I 'realize,' all right, all right. I don't need no 'wakening sense.' But maybe I've made it clear to you now why it is I don't go cavorting off by the next train to console and cheer up the boy who's brought this on us. I don't just hanker——"

"Don't take that tone, I beg, sir!" pleaded the lawyer, deeply pained by what underlay the father's half-scoffing, ironical tirade. "He may live it down. He is only twenty-four. The jury will surely be lenient. After all, there's the 'unwritten law' and——"

"And of all the slimy rot ever thought up by a paretic's brain, that same 'unwritten law' is about the rankest specimen," snarled Caleb. "By the time a man's learned to live up to all the *written* laws, I guess he won't have a hell of a lot of leisure left to go moseying around among the unwritten ones. Whenever a coward takes a pot-shot at some one within half a mile of a petticoat, up goes the 'unwritten law' scream. Use it if you like in the trial, but for God's sake cut out such hypocritical bosh when you're talking to *me*. 'Unwritten law!' Why don't the Legislature take a day off and write it?"

"Then you won't come with me to town?" asked the lawyer, with another covert glance at his watch.

"Come with you and tell Jerry how sorry I am for him, and how I sympathize with him for killing his mother—for that's what it'll come to—and for wrecking a name I've spent all my life building up for him, and for making me the shame of all my friends? No, Wendell, I guess I'll have to deprive him of that treat. I'll think up later what's best to do about him. In the meantime get him acquitted.

"Acquitted? That is not so easy. But——"

"Not so easy? Why ain't it? Didn't I tell you to draw on me for all you wanted? I've got somewhere between forty and fifty millions all told. The jury don't live this side of the own-your-own-cloud suburbs of heaven that hasn't at least one man on it that $100,000 will buy. If not that, then $1,000,000. I'll leave the details to you. Buy enough jurors to 'hang' every verdict till they get tired of trying Jerry and turn him loose to save the State further expense. If a murderer ain't convicted on his first trial, it's a cinch he's never going to be on his second or third. Now, it's up to you to buy that drawn verdict for the first trial, and then for the others till they acquit him or parole him in your custody. It's been done before, and it'll be done again. This ain't a 'life-and-death matter,' as you called it. It's a question of dollars and cents. And as long as I've got enough of those same dollars and cents, no boy of mine's going to the death-chair or to life imprisonment either. You'll have to hustle for that train. If you miss it, come back and I'll put you up for the night."

Tense excitement, as was lately his way, had made the formerly taciturn Railroader voluble. He now, as frequently since the night of his speech at the reception, noted this, himself, with a vague surprise.

"If Jerry wants any ready money, just now—" he began, as he escorted the lawyer to the door.

"He seems to have plenty for any immediate needs," returned Wendell. "I saw the contents of his pockets that the police had taken charge of. Besides the morphine case and a few cards and a packet of letters in a sealed wrapper, there were large-denomination bills to the amount of——"

"Packet of letters—sealed?" croaked Conover, catching the other's arm in a grasp that bit to the point of agony. "Letters?" he repeated, his throat dry and contracted.

"Oh, I meant to speak to you about them. Gerald asked me to bring them along. He said he got them for you from a man in Ballston to-day, and was to have sent them to you by registered mail. But in the hurry of catching the New York train and the excitement over the prospects of seeing——"

"Where are they? Did you bring them?"

"I couldn't," answered Wendell, marveling at the lightning change in his client's voice and face. "The police, of course, took charge of them. They will have to be examined by the district attorney's office before——"

"You must hurry or you'll miss your train. Good night."

Conover slammed the door on his astonished guest and walked back into the library.

In the middle of the room where he had so vainly sought to inculcate into his family the "pleasant home hour" habit, the Railroader now stood alone, silent, without motion, his shrewd face an empty, expressionless mask of gray, his eyes alone burning like live coals, showing that the brain within in no way shared the outer shell's inertia.

"I've got to work this out later, when I've more time," he muttered.

And with the resolve came the impulse so common to him when troubled or excited.

"Gaines!" he called to the butler, who, late though the hour was, had not received permission on this great night to retire, "Gaines! order Dunderberg saddled and brought around in fifteen minutes, and have Giles ride with me to-night."

Caleb went up to his dressing-room and hastily changed into his riding clothes.

As he strapped on the second of his spurs a confused babel of sound arose just beyond his dressing-room. This apartment served as a sort of antechamber to the study. The noise, therefore, must have come, he knew, from the bevy of men he had left there. This patent fact dawned on Conover as a surprise. He had forgotten his followers' existence, forgotten the undecided election, the impending Grafton returns on which its result would hang. He had even, since Wendell's departure, forgotten Jerry's plight and his own rage and mortification thereat. All life—all the future—now concentrated, for him, about the Denzlow packet, whose contents must by this time, or by morning at latest, be known to the authorities. This last and greatest blow had filled all his emotions, driving out lesser thoughts, fears, hopes and griefs, as a cyclone might rip to thin air the dawn mists over a lake.

Now, at the clamor in the study, he pulled himself together. The iron will still held. He strode to the connecting door and opened it. The tumult had died down, and Staatz alone was now speaking. So intent were the speaker and his hearers that none noted the Boss's advent from so unexpected a quarter. On the threshold stood Caleb, surveying the scene with quiet contempt.

"And that's how it is!" Staatz was declaiming. "We're licked. *Licked!* Pretty sort of news for Democrats *this* is!" picking up a newly-broken length of ticker tape around which the other men had been clustering. "'City of Grafton, complete: Conover 5,100, Standish 12,351.' Is it a wonder you all went nutty when you got it? In Grafton, too, stronghold of Democracy. This means the State for Standish by an easy 4,000, maybe more. And who's to blame? Are you? Am I? Not us! We've had—the whole party's had—our hands tied behind us. And we were sent in to fight like that. Could we use the good old moves? Not us! It must be kid-glove, silk-sock, amachoor politics, meeting Standish on his own ground. No wonder he licked us! A Prohibitionist could have licked men that were hampered like we were. And who was it tied our hands? Who got the party beat and the Machine smashed? Who did it? Caleb Conover!"

He paused panting and sweating with wrath. Then, encouraged by a murmur of assent that ran around the ring of listeners, he bellowed:

"We ain't in politics for our health, are we? It's our bread and butter. That bread and butter's been snatched away from us. Who by? Caleb Conover! Are you going to be led by the nose any longer by a man who betrays you like that? For my part *I'm* tired of wearing his collar."

A growl of approbation greeted his query. His bellow changed to a lower tone of persuasion.

"I ain't saying," he resumed, "but what Conover's done work for the Machine. In his day he was a great man, but his day's past. He's breaking up. Don't this campaign prove he is? Makes us throw our chances out of the winder for Standish to pick up. And when we're waiting news from the deciding city he plays a phonograph, and then wanders off and most likely forgets we're here. There's another thing: How did Richard Croker and Charlie Murphy and Matt Quay and N. Bonaparte and all the rest of the big bosses hold their power? By keeping their mouths shut. When Croker once began to talk, what happened? Down tumbled all his power. Same with Quay. Same with N'poleon. Same with all of 'em. Talking was the first sign of losing hold.

Look at Conover's case. We can all remember when words was as hard to get out of him as dollars. How about him now? Talks to any one. I tell you he's breaking up. Unless we want the Machine to break up for good and all, too, we got to get a new Leader."

"If the new Leader's *you*, Adolphe Staatz," cut in a rasping snarl, like a dog's, from the group of politicians, as Billy Shevlin shouldered his way forward and thrust his unshaven face close to the district leader's bristling gray mustache, "if *you're* the new Leader you're rootin' for, let me put you wise to somethin': You'll go to the primaries straight from the hospital, an' with your shyster mug in a sling. Fer, if I hear another peep out of you, roastin' the Boss, I'll knock you from under your hat, and push your ugly face in till your back teeth bend. *You* take the Boss's job? Chee! It's to ha-ha! Go chase yourself, 'fore I chase you so far you'll d'scover a new street. *You'd* backtrack Mister Conover, would you'se? Why, if you go 'round Granite spreadin' idees of that kind in your own pin-head brain, I'll sure be c'mpelled to do all sorts of things to you. An' when I'm finished with you the Staatz family'll be able to indulge in that alloorin' pastime called 'Put Papa Together!' *You* fer

Leader, eh? Say! I'm flatterin' you a whole heap when I call you——"

"Let him alone, Billy," intervened Bourke, as the startled Staatz backed toward the wall, ever followed by that belligerent, blue-jawed little face so close to his own—"let him alone. He's talking straight. I for one——"

"You for one," sounded a sneering voice from the dressing-room doorway behind them, "you for one, friend Bourke, were starving on the street when I took you in and fed you and got your kids out of the Protectory and gave you a job."

At the first word the mumbled assent to Staatz's and Bourke's opinion, that had welled up in a dozen throats, died into sacred silence.

"You for another, 'Dolphe Staatz," went on Caleb, still standing on the threshold and viewing the group of malcontents with a cold disgust. "You were on the road to the 'pen' for knowing too much about that 'queer paper' joint on Willow Street, when I got the indictment quashed and squared things with the district attorney and put you on your feet.

"Caine," turning to the *Star's* editor, "I think I heard *you* agreeing among the rest, didn't I, hey? Diff'r't sound from the kind you made when you come to me twelve years ago and cried and said the *Star* was all in, and would I save you from going bankrupt by taking it over? And there's plenty more of you here with the same sort of story to tell."

He strode forward and was among them, forcing one after another to meet his eye, dominating by his very presence the men who had sought to dethrone him. In his hour of stress all the old power, the splendid rulership of men, surged back upon the Railroader. He stood a king amid awestruck serfs, a stern schoolmaster among a naughty band of scared children.

"Some one spoke about being tired of wearing my collar," he said. "Is there a man here who put on that collar against his will, or a man who didn't beg for it? Is there a man who hasn't profited by it? A man who hasn't risen as I have risen and benefited when I benefited? Don't stand there, mumchance, like a lot of dago section-hands! You were ready enough to speak before I came in. Why aren't you, now? Is it because you're so sorry for this poor, broken old man, who talks too much and ain't fit to run the Machine any longer, eh? Spit it out, Staatz! If you're qualifying for my shoes you got to learn to look less like a whipped puppy when you're spoke to. Stand up and state your grievance like a man, you Dutch crook that I lifted out of jail! You, too, Bourke! Where's your tongue? And all the rest of you that was on the point of choosing a new Leader."

No one answered. The Boss's instinct power rather than his mere words held them sulky and dumb. Over each was creeping the old subservience to the peerless will that had so long shaped the Mountain State's destinies and theirs.

"I talk too much, eh?" mocked Conover. "Well, to prove that's so, I'm going to give you curs a little Sunday-school talk right now. You say I cut out the old methods, this campaign. I did. And why did I do it? Because if these reformers had thought they were licked unfair there's so many of 'em they'd 'a' carried the case to every court in the land, and 'a' drawed the whole country's op'ra-glasses onto this p'ticular Machine, and started another such wave as swamped Dick Croker and Tammany in '94. And then where'd the Machine and you fellers have been? There's got to be reform in a State just so often, just like there's got to be croup in a nursery. Every other State's had it. And each time they've fished up something queer about their local Machine, and that same Machine's never been so strong again. Well, the Mountain State's turn for reform was overdue. It had to come. And this was the time. I thought maybe I could beat 'em on their own ground. If I had, that'd 'a' ended reform here, forever and amen. Even if I was beat I knew the people would get so sick of one term of reform, they'd come screeching to us to take 'em back. And then's the time my kid-glove stunts of this campaign would shine out fine against a rotten reform administration. The Machine would escape any investigation of the kind that follers a crooked campaign, and we'd simply be begged to take everything in sight for the rest of our lives. Maybe you think a chance of one term out of office was too much to pay for such a future cinch?"

The speech—reasons and all—was improvised as he spoke. And again it was the Boss's manner and his brutal magnetism rather than his words that carried conviction.

"Because I didn't print this all out in big letters and simple words that you dolts could understand," resumed Caleb, "you forget the holes I've got you and the party out of in the past, and go grouching about my 'breaking up.' Maybe my brain *is* softening a bit, just to keep company with the ninnies I travel with. But it's still a *brain*. And that's more'n anyone else here can boast of having. Now, I've showed you how the land lays. Which of *you* would 'a' carried the Machine over it any safer, and how would he'd 'a' done it? *You*, for instance, Staatz?"

The big German sheepishly grumbled something unintelligible under his breath.

"Sounds about as clear and sensible as most of your ideas, 'Dolphe," commented Caleb. "You'll have to learn more words'n that before you're Boss. Now, then," he resumed, throwing aside his stolid bearing and hammering imperiously on the table with his riding crop, "we'll proceed to choose a new Leader. It's irregular, but there's easy a quorum of district leaders here. Who'll it be that steps into Caleb Conover's shoes? Who'll say he's strong enough to hold the reins he thinks I'm too weak to handle? Who'll it be? I lifted the party and every man here from the dirt to a higher, stronger place than anyone dreamed they *could* be lifted. Who'll hold 'em there now that *I* stand aside? Speak up! Choose your leader!"

"*CONOVER!*" yelled Billy Shevlin ecstatically.

"Shut up, you mangy little tough!" fiercely ordered Caleb; but a half-score of eager voices had caught up the cry. About the Railroader pressed the district leaders, smiting him on the back, striving to grab his hands, over and over again vociferating his name; crying out on him to stand by them, to lead them, to forgive their ingratitude and folly.

And in the centre of the exultant babel stood Caleb Conover, unmoved save for a sneering smile that twisted one corner of his hard mouth, the only man present who was not carried away by that crazy wave of reactive enthusiasm.

" Staatz," observed the Railroader, as the hubbub at length died down, " I'm afraid you'll have to wait a wee peckle longer for that leadership. But cheer up. Everything comes to the man who waits—till no one else wants it. I've got one thing more to say, and then my ' talking ' will be done for good, as far as you men are concerned. I had a kennel of dogs once, on my place here. A whole lot of pedigreed, high-priced whelps that it cost me a fortune to buy. I thought maybe I'd enjoy their society. It was so much sensibler'n politicians'. But somehow after a while I got tired of 'em. For they didn't take to me, not from the first. Animals don't, as a rule. Every now and then when I'd go to their enclosure they'd forget to mind me, and once or twice they combined and tried to get me down and throttle me. Of course I could lash 'em into minding, and

I could lash all the fight out of 'em when they started for my throat. And I did. But by and by I got tired of having to lick the brutes every few days in order to make 'em treat me decent. They weren't worth the trouble. So I got rid of them. Just as I'm going to get rid of you fellers, and for the same good reason. I resign. I'm out of politics for good. As far as I'm concerned the Machine is smashed for all time. Now clear out of here, the whole kennelful of you. Be on your way!"

Stilling the furious volley of protest that had arisen on all sides at his announcement, Caleb flung open the outer door of his study. Several of the dazed politicians essayed to speak, but the quick gleam in their self-deposed Leader's eye halted the words ere they were spoken. Obedient, cowed to the last, the Machine's officers and henchmen finally yielded to that look and to the peremptory gesture of the Railroader's arm. One by one they filed out, Staatz in the van, Bourke with averted gaze slinking along in the rear.

With a grunt of ultimate dismissal Conover closed the door.

Glancing over the scene of the late conflict before departing for his ride, his glance fell on a solitary, ill-dressed figure seated at one corner of the deserted table.

"Billy!" exclaimed Conover, exasperated, "why didn't you get out with the rest?"

"'Cause I don't belong with that cheapskate push. I belong here with you, Boss."

"But I'm out of it, you idiot. Out of the game for good and all. I'm leaving Granite."

"When do we start?"

Conover looked at his little henchman in annoyance that merged into a vexed laugh.

"I tell you," he repeated, "I'm out of politics for good."

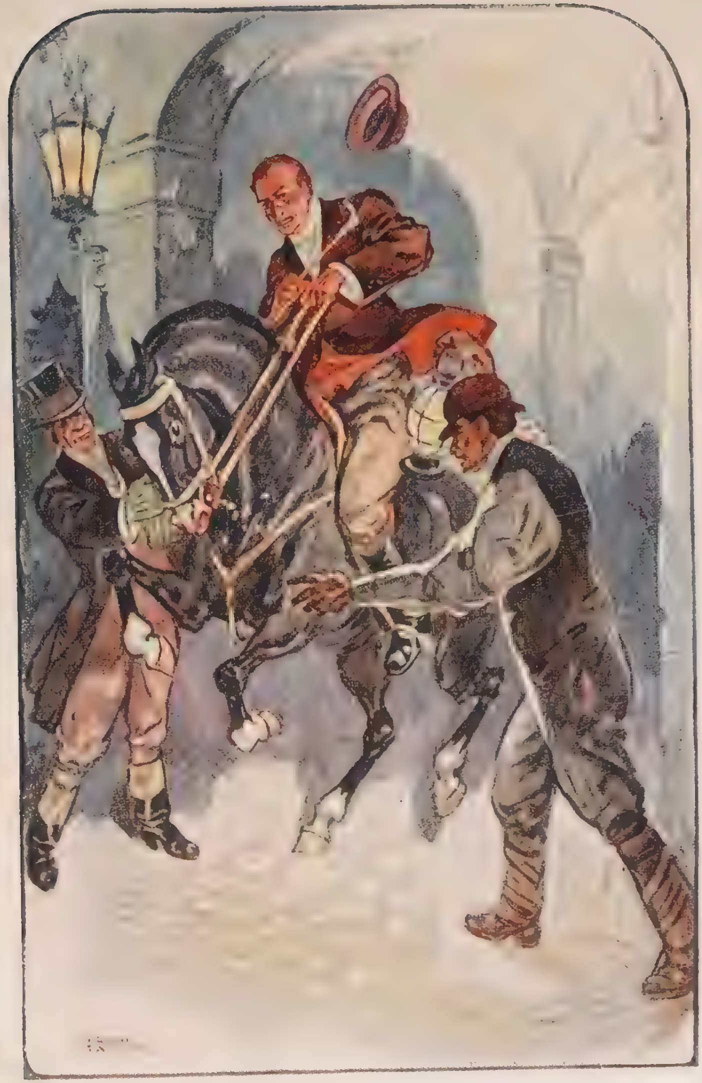
"So'm I, then," cheerfully responded Billy. "D'ye know, Boss, I'm kind o' glad. Sometimes I've suspicioned politics wasn't—well, wasn't quite square. Maybe it's best that two pious men like us is out of it. Now, say, Mister Conover," he hurried on more seriously, "I know what you mean. You want to shake the whole bunch. You're sore on 'em all. You're goin' to cut out Granite, too, after the lemon you've been handed. But whatever your game is an' wherever you spiel it, it won't do you no harm to have Billy Shevlin along with you as a 'also-ran.' Now, will it? Why, Boss, I've worked for you ever since I was no bigger'n—no bigger'n Staatz's chances of becomin' a white man. An' I ain't goin' to cut out the old job at this time of day. If it ain't Caleb Conover, Governor, I work for, then it'll be Caleb Conover, Something-or other. An' that's good enough for W. Shevlin. So let's let it go at that. I won't bother you no more to-night, 'cause I see you're on edge. But I'm comin' around in the mornin'. An' when I come I'm comin' for keeps. Just like I've always done. So long, Boss."

"Poor old Billy!" muttered Conover as the Shevlin slipped out too hurriedly to permit of his Leader's framing any reply to what was quite the longest speech the henchman had ever made. "He'll never make a hit in politics till he gets rid of some of that loyalty. Next to gratitood there ain't another vice that hampers a man so bad."

Then, dismissing the recent events from his mind, the Railroader ran downstairs, lightly as a boy, and to the outer entrance, where Dunderberg was plunging and pivoting in the grip of two grooms. A third groom, mounted on a quieter steed, sat well beyond range of the stallion's lashing heels.

Late as it was, Mrs. Conover was still up. Caleb brushed past her in the hall, cutting short the feeble remonstrances with which she always prefaced one of his wild rides.

"Oh, Caleb!" she pleaded as she followed him out on the broad veranda. "Not to-night, dear! Just give it up this once, to please ME! He's—he's such a terrible horse. I never saw him so wild as he is now. The



"All right!" shouted Conover, in glorious excitement. "All right! Let him go! Never mind the hat." Page 313.

men can scarcely hold him. Oh, please——"

But the Railroader was already preparing to mount.

"Don't you worry, old girl," he called back over his shoulder; " he's none too wild for my taste. There never was a horse yet could get the best of me."

The wind was rising again. It whistled across the grounds, ruffling the puddles and stirring the dead leaves. A whiff of it caught Conover's hat as he fought his way to the plunging stallion's back. The exultance of coming battle was already upon both rider and horse.

" Your hat, sir! " called one of the grooms, as another sprang forward to catch the falling headgear. But Caleb had no mind to wait for trifles. The night wind was in his face, the furious horse whirling and rearing between his vice-like knee-grip.

" All right! " shouted Conover in glorious excitement, signalling to the struggling groom to release the bit. " All right! Let him go! Never mind the hat. Come on, Giles."

Dunderberg, his head freed, leaped forward as from a catapult. Master and man thundered away down the drive, and were swallowed in the blackness. The double roar of flying hoofs grew fainter, then was lost in the solemn hush of the autumn night.

CHAPTER XV

DUNDERBERG SOLVES THE DIFFICULTY

Clive Standish had spent the evening at the Civic League headquarters, awaiting reports of the day's battle. The rooms were full of the League's minor candidates and officials, with a fair sprinkling of women. Anice Lanier, chaperoned by her aunt, with whom she now lived, was there, her high color and the light in her big eyes alone betraying the fearful suspense under which she labored.

The belated returns, which should have been telegraphed at once to the League headquarters, were still further delayed by the fact that the one wire now running into town had been preëmpted by Conover. Hence, it was not until well after one o'clock that Clive received definite news of his own election. Throngs of friends and supporters had, on receipt of the final figures, flocked about him with congratulations and good wishes. To all he had given seeming heed, yet among the crush he saw but one face, read in one pair of brown eyes the praise and infinite gladness he sought.

And as soon as he could he departed with Anice and her aunt for the latter's home, where a little *souper à trois* was to celebrate the victory.

They formed a jolly trio about the dainty supper table. Late as it was, all were far too excited to feel sleepy or wish to curtail by one minute the little feast of triumph.

" To the next Governor of the Mountain State! " proclaimed Anice solemnly, as she lifted her glass. " To be drunk standing, and with— No, no, Clive," she reproved as the Governor-elect also rose. " *You* mustn't drink it. It's——"

" I'm not going to," retorted Standish indignantly. " I'm getting up to look for a dictionary."

" But what on earth——"

" I want to find the feminine for Governor. And——"

A whirr of the telephone bell broke in on his explanation.

" Some stupid political message for you," hazarded Anice, taking down the receiver. " Yes, this is 318 R. Yes. Yes, this is Miss La— Oh! " with a changed intonation, " Mrs. Conover? "

A longer pause. Then Anice gave a little exclamation of sympathy, listened a moment and said:

" Yes, we will come at once. But I hope you'll find it's not as bad as you think. Don't break down. I'm sure it will be all right."

" What is it? " asked Clive and her aunt in a breath.

" I'm not quite sure," answered the girl. " She was so upset I could hardly understand her. Besides, the wires are still in bad condition. But it seems some accident or injury has happened to her husband. Gerald is away, and there is no one the poor woman can turn to, so she telephoned for me. And, Clive, she wants to know if you won't come, too. Please, do. You're the only relative she has. And she's *so* unhappy."

" Just as you wish," acceded Standish, with no great willingness, " but I'll be sorry to have to-night's happiness marred by another row with Conover."

" I gather from what she says he is in no condition for a ' row ' with anyone. I told her we'd come at once. Please hurry, dear. I hate to think of that frightened little woman trying to meet any sort of a crisis alone."

In the great, comfortless drawing-room of the Mausoleum, on a couch hastily pushed into the centre of the room under the chandelier, lay Caleb Conover, Railroader. Two doctors, who had been working over him, had now drawn back a few paces and were conferring in grave undertones. At the foot of the couch, clad only in nightgown and slippers, as she had been aroused from bed, her sparse hair tight-clumped in a semicircle of kid-curlers, Mrs. Conover crouched in a moaning, rocking heap. Scared, whispering groups of servants blocked the doorways or peered curiously in from behind curtains. The air was thick with the pungent smell of antiseptics.

The Railroader, lying motionless beneath the unshaded glare of a half-dozen gas jets, was swathed of head and bandaged of arm. He was coatless, and his shirt and waistcoat were thrown open disclosing his mighty chest. Across the couch-end his feet, still booted and spurred, protruded stiffly as a manikin's.

It was upon this scene that Anice and Clive entered. At sight of the girl, Mrs. Conover scrambled to her feet, and with a wild outburst of scared sobs, scuttled forward to meet her, the bedside slippers shuffling and sliding grotesquely along the polished floor. Anice took the panic-stricken, weeping creature into her arms and whispered what words of comfort and encouragement she could.

Meanwhile Clive, not desiring to break in on the doctors' conference, turned to the doorway again and asked a question of one of the servants. For reply the groom, Giles, was thrust forward and obliged to repeat, with dolorous unction, for the tenth time within an hour, the story of the accident.

"You see, sir," he said, lowering his voice as though in the room with a corpse, "Mr. Conover sent word for me to ride with him. We started off at a dead run, and my horse couldn't noways keep up with Dunderberg, so I follows along behind as fast as I could, but I couldn't keep up to the right distance between us, to save me. Mr. Conover turns out of the drive, up Pompton Av'noo, sir, and on past the Humason place, me a-followin' as fast as I could. All of a sudden I catches up. It's in that dark, woody patch of road just this side the quarries. The way I happens to catch up is because Dunderberg was havin' one of them tantrums of his an' Mr. Conover was givin' it to him for all he was worth, crop an' spur, an' Dunderberg a-whirlin' around and passagin' an' tryin' his best to rear. An' every time that horse's forelegs goes up in the air Mr. Conover'd bring his fist down between his ears an' down'd come Dunderberg on all-fours again. They was takin' up all the road, wide as it is, an' Dunderberg was lashin' an' plungin' like he was crazy, an'

Mr. Conover stickin' on like he was glued there an' sendin' in the spurs and the whacks of the crop till you'd 'a' thought he'd kill the brute. Then, Dunderberg makes a dive ahead an' gets out alongside the quarry-pit an' tries to rear again. Right on the edge of the pit."

"Yes," said Clive excitedly, as the groom paused, "and then?"

"Why, sir, I can't rightly tell, the light was so bad. If it'd been anyone else but Mr. Conover, I'd say he lost his nerve, an' when Dunderberg reared up he forget to bring him down like he'd done those other times, or maybe he *did* hit the horse between the ears again an' didn't hit hard enough. Anyhow, over goes Dunderberg backward—clean fifteen feet drop—into the quarry. An' Mr. Conover under him. An' then——"

But Clive had moved away. The doctors had finished their consultation, and one of them—Dr. Hawes, the Conover family physician—had again approached that silent figure on the couch.

At sight of Standish the second doctor came forward to meet the young man.

"No," he whispered, reading the unspoken question in Clive's face, "no possible hope. He can't last over an hour longer at most. Another man, crushed as he was, would have been killed at once. As it is, he probably won't recover consciousness. Nothing but his tremendous vitality holds the shreds of life in him so long as this."

"Does his wife know——?"

"She is not in a state to be told. I wish we could persuade her to leave the room. Perhaps Miss Lanier——"

A gesture from Dr. Hawes drew them toward the couch.

"He is coming to his senses," said the family physician, adding under his breath, so that only his colleague and Clive could hear; "it is the final rally. Not one man in a thousand——"

But Clive had caught Anice's eye and beckoned her to lead Mrs. Conover to the side of the couch.

The Railroader's face, set like carven granite, began to twitch. The rigid mouth relaxed its set whiteness and the eyelids flickered. Mrs. Conover, at these signs of life, prepared for a fresh attack of hysteria, but a gentle, firm pressure of Anice's hand in hers forestalled the outburst. With an aggrieved look at the girl, Letty again turned her scared attention to her husband.

Dr. Hawes was bending once more over the prostrate man, seeking to employ a restorative. Now he rose, and as he did so, Caleb's eyes opened.

There was no bewilderment, no surprise nor pain in the calm glance that swept his garish surroundings.

"Is he suffering?" whispered Anice. "Or——?"

"Horribly," returned Dr. Hawes in the same tone. "He——"

The shrewd, pale eyes that scorned to show trace of physical or mental anguish, slowly took in the group beside the couch, resting first on the two physicians, then on Anice Lanier.

As he saw and recognized Anice the first change came over the dying man's hard-set features. A look of perplexity that merged into glad surprise lighted his whole face, smoothing from it with magic touch every line of care, thought or time; transfiguring it into the countenance of a happy boy. Long he sought and held her sympathetic glance, that look of youth and gladness growing and deepening on his face, while all around stood silent and marvelling.

It was Mrs. Conover who broke the spell.

"Oh, Caleb!" she wailed querulously, "you *said* no horse could get the better of you. And now——"

At her words the beatific light was gone from Conover's eyes. In its stead came a gleam of grim, ironical amusement. Then, his gaze travelling past Anice to Clive Standish, his brows contracted in a frown of displeasure. But this, too, faded. The swathed head settled lower among the cushions, the powerful body seemed to shrink and flatten. The eyes closed, and Conover lay very still.

His wife, divining for the first time the actual state of affairs, flung herself forward on her knees beside the silent figure, her sobs scaling to a crescendo cry of terror.

Slowly Caleb Conover opened his eyes. Reluctantly, as though drawn back by sheer force from the very threshold of the wide portals of Rest, his spirit paused for an instant longer in its earthly abode—paused and flared up, as a dying spark, in the Railroader's stiffening face.

For a moment his eyes—already wide with the awful mystery of the Beyond—strayed over his kneeling wife; over the sparse locks bunched up in that halo of kid curlers; over the pudgy shape so mercilessly outlined by the sheer nightgown; over the tear-swollen red eyes, the blotched cheeks, the quivering, pursed-up mouth.

" Letty," he panted, in tired disgust, " you look—more like a measly rabbit—every day! "

THE END

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